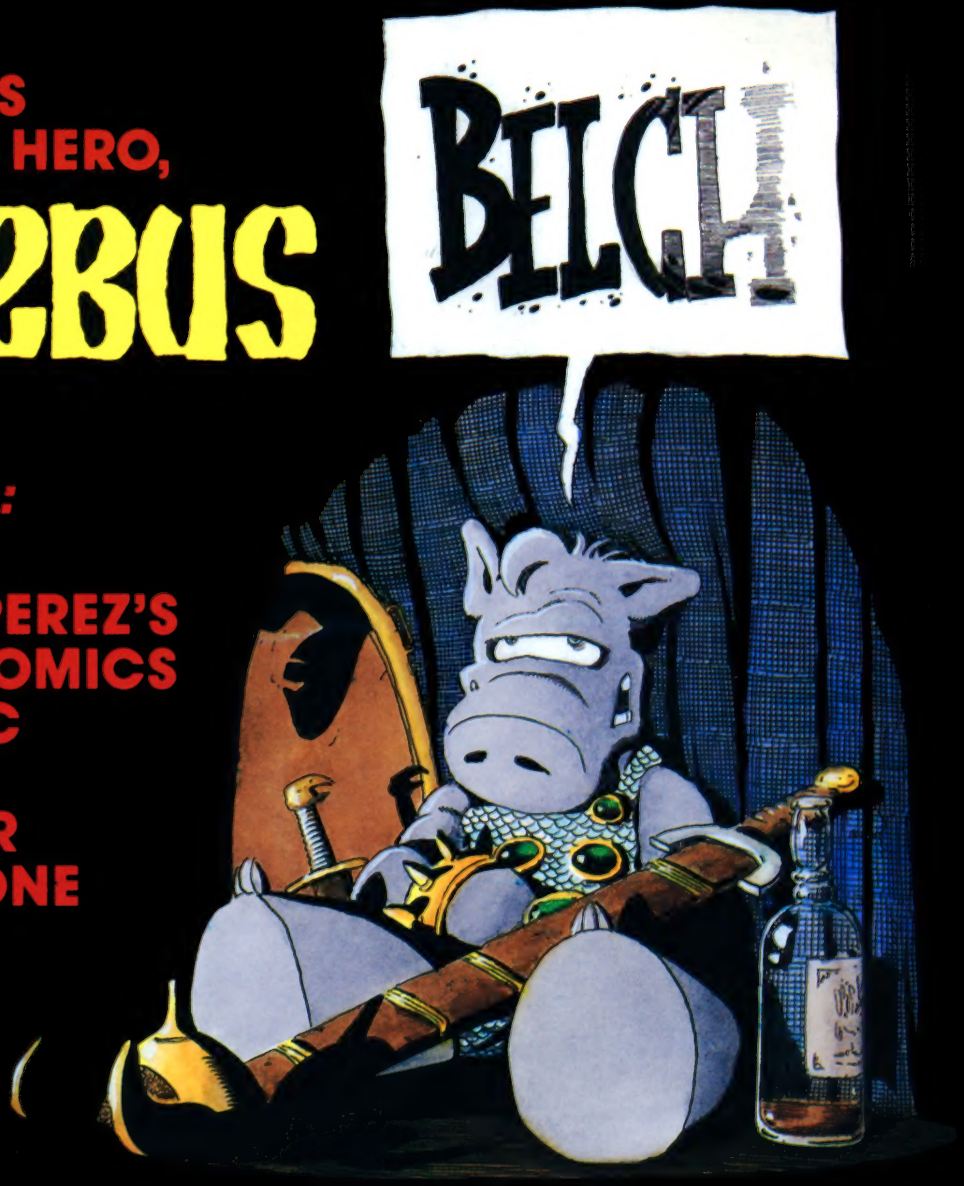
No. 201 • May, 1992 • $3.95 ($4.75 Can.)

AMAZING HEROES

PULPS VS. COMICS

SPOTLIGHT ON THIS MONTH'S AMAZING HERO,

CEREBUS



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ISSUE TWO

X-FACTOR ARTIST **LARRY STROMAN**

JOINS CONTINÜM COMICS WITH

RICK BRYANT AND TOM VINCENT

QUARTERLY FROM

CONTINÜM COMICS

EDITORIAL

Correction: Patrick Rollo and Raymond Kryssing were the artists of the Freddy Krueger pictures on page 42 of *AH* #199, not the Day Brothers.

Also, I made a goof with the solicitation for *AH* #201. Jeff Lang told me he was going to interview Martin Wagner of *Hepcats* fame, but I heard it as *Matt* Wagner of *Grendel* fame. I guess it was Matt's friendship with "Few Words" interviewee Joe Matt that mixed me up. Martin says this thing happens all the time to him, and I apologize for adding one more chapter to his collection of mix-up stories.

Cartoons: Since the last time I wrote this editorial, I've had a chance to see *Fish Police* and *Capitol Critters*, the first big animated TV series since *The Simpsons* hit the air more than two whole years ago. Alas, they haven't vanquished my fear that the networks have no idea what to do with animation. In fact, they've confirmed it.

The only interesting thing about *Capitol Critters*, which has been ballyhood for almost a year, is how incredibly schizophrenic it is in its approach to its audience. As reported in *AH* #200, the show's producers are insistent on distancing themselves from *The Simpsons*, which they insist isn't even a real cartoon but an "animated comedy." The reasoning is that *The Simpsons* could be done as a live action show and *Capitol Critters* couldn't. Right. Just try imagining any *Simpsons* show done with a live cast, and you'd see how ridiculous an assumption that is. The show's humor is too outrageous, its pacing too frenetic. On the other hand, if you imagine *Critters* done live with people dressed in rat costumes (a la *Dinosaurs*) it would work just fine. Unfortunately.

The producers were also desperate to convince people that *Critters* was essentially a kid's show. Why they would do this is beyond me. Kids, of course, are attracted to almost any kind of animation, and don't need to be sold on it. To succeed im prime time, an animated show must also appeal to adults, which is what *The Simpsons* does, and what *The Flintstones* did in its earlier, more highly rated seasons.

What's really shocking, though, is that *Capitol Critters* really has no qualms about being raunchy. Scattered through the show are dirty jokes designed to draw in the adult audience. A rat walking though a men's room says that he can spot the secret servicemen because their aim is so good. The Simpsons, believe it or not, would never sink this low; even their most risque material has some kind of context other than to keep the adults viewers from falling asleep.

The rest of the show's "adult appeal" comes from its alleged political content, which is strictly of the knee-jerk variety. The episodes are mostly the kind of simplistic and deadly earnest morality plays that serve as a nice substitute for real plots and humor in most shows aimed at children.

Unbelievably, *Fish Police* is worse. Where *Capitol Critters* imitates Don Bluth imitating Disney, *Fish Police*, which only remotely resembles the Steve Moncuse comic, uses some of the oldest tricks in Hanna-Barbera's hat. Just as *The Flintstones* crossed *The Honeymooners* with cavemen to give the appearance of a fresh idea, so does *Fish Police* cross detective cliches with marine life to make a "new" concept. But the detective formula is even more tired than the super-hero formula, and there's really nothing inherently funny about fish. I would have watched the whole first episode, but I had a movie to go see, and after I saw the wacky sidekick who constantly tries out new disguises, I felt I'd seen enough.

The combination of these two shows is likely to destroy any chance animation had of making it on network TV, and it's all because Hollywood refuses to believe that there really is such a thing as a show that's too stupid to succeed.

Muscle: I was going to review some books in this column, but that other stuff I talked about didn't leave me much space, so I'll have just do *Muscle* by Samuel Wilson Fussell.

Muscle is the true story of a young intellectual who became obsessed with becoming a professional bodybuilder. What makes the book fascinating is that, unlike most bodybuilders, Wilson can write and is not afraid of exposing the dark underside of the sport.

I realize that this is not technically a comic book subject, but as I have stated before, I feel that bodybuilding and super-hero comics have had a great effect on each other. In its early days, bodybuilding was promoted chiefly through the ads that appeared in super-hero comics. Fussell descibes these as early as the second papagraph of his first chapter: "On the back pages of comic books, scrawny teens find advertisements for chest expanders and chin-up bars. For many that's where the affair ends: in an unmailed letter or as cobwebbed, unused equipment piled in the basement."

And, as the physique of bodybuilders began to surpass even the most idealized super-hero, the heroes' muscles expanded to catch up. Another parallel to comics is that, like Batman, bodybuilders are becoming darker and grittier. "Gone were the days of India clubs and Charles Atlas. I had seen a photo of him once, smiling and flexing on the beach, supporting a pair of bathing beauties on his broad shoulders. He made lifting seem as easy and pleasant as a Sunday afternoon stroll in the park." Bodybuilding and superheroing are now ugly undertakings, and their adherents revel in the ruthlessness and pain they now require.

And if Fussell is a good example, many bodybuilders are Clark Kents wishing to become Superman. Fussell admits that he wanted to seem invincible so that he would not have to deal with the outside world or his own self-doubt.

But, like the '60s Marvel superheroes, Fussell discovered that the fantasy ideal he'd achieved made him no happier than the scrawniness he left behind. He could scare ordinary people to death just by looking at them, but the unhappiness that drove him into pumping iron was still there. The one thing he did learn from bodybuilding was that it wouldn't make his problems go away, and, tired of the four-hour workouts, the drugs, and constantly gorging food to increase his size, he left the scene. As Fussell put it, "The inflated cartoon I became relieved me from the responsibility of being human. But once I'd become that caricature, that inflated cartoon, I longed for something else. As painful and humiliating as it is to be human, being subhuman or superhuman is far worse."

Next Issue: A look at Image Comics line, a visit to Marvel UK, a long-awaited history of Brother Power the Geek, an interview with *Lowlife* cartoonist Ed Brubaker, the debut of "Anvil Man," more intelligent DC gorillas, and an exclusive visit to the set of *Batman Returns!*

—THOMAS HARRINGTON

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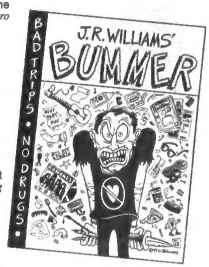

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COVER BY DAVE SIM & GERHARD

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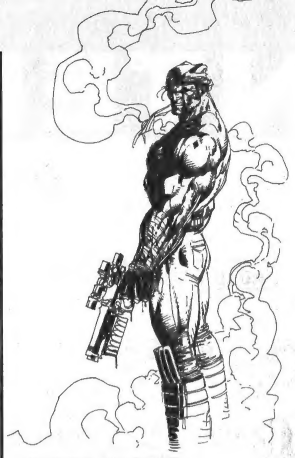

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PERSPECTIVE

COMIC BOOKS AND PULP MAGAZINES

Divergent Pasts, Convergent Futures?

by Bob Hughes

In the beginning, there were newsstands.

The downtowns of America were littered with them; vendors hawking their wares from every street corner, loaded with more reading material than anyone could hope to consume: magazines and newspapers from everywhere, in every language one could think of, from slick glossies aimed at convincing those with money to spend it, to cheap pulps aimed at convincing those who had no money to forget about it. They also published comic books.

From the 1930's through the 1950's pulp magazines and comic books shared these newsstands. In many ways they were similar reading material for the average American. For one thin dime, the same price as a Saturday matinee, you could get a week's reading pleasure. Both offered formula fiction. Many featured the same characters from issue to issue, while, in others, new characters would enact the same plots every month. At their peak, there were as many as 250 pulps on sale, with something for every reading taste, from *Firefighters* to *Speakeasy Stories, Twice A Month Love Book, Weird Tales, Amazing Stories*, and *Doc Savage*.

Some have said that comics replaced the pulps, yet they co-existed for twenty years. Others have blamed the pulps' demise on television or a general decline in literacy, yet the sales of books in general and children's books in particular have been growing astronomically for the past three decades. In reality, the pulps have not vanished at all. They have simply been re-formatted. By converting to paperbacks, the pulp publishers managed to surmount the economic factors that continue to frustrate comic book publishers to this day. These economic factors determine what magazines are distributed, and how.

The publishers of those pulps found a way to deal with the changes which made newsstands obsolete, changes which comic book publishers are still wrestling with. They were able to meet the demands of the market place in such a way that their sales became better than ever. Meanwhile, the comics publishers, having stuck to the traditional sales methods of the '30s and '40s, have almost vanished from the national consciousness.

The problem confronting both genres was the same—inventory control. Every successful business tries to have just enough product on hand at every level to meet demand, while not producing extra goods that will remain unsold. Unsold product constitutes a two-fold loss of revenue: first, the cost of producing it and second, the cost of storing it. Since retail outfits have only so much space available, unsold merchandise can be a major problem, particularly when the new merchandise comes in on a regular basis. The comic and pulp publishers settled on different solutions to this problem, with widely differing results.

The primary method of handling unsold merchandise in the magazine industry is to return it to the distributor. The distributor then either returns it to the publisher or more likely destroys it and applies for credit on future orders. The publisher has to eat the losses.

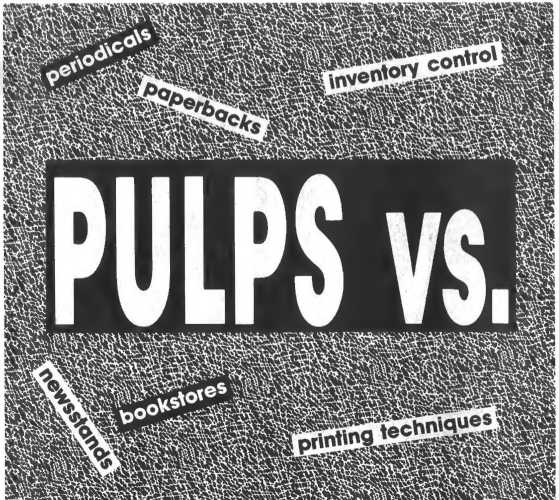
Comics and pulp publishers tried many gambits over the years to delay returns as much as possible, reasoning that as long as the product is out there it has a chance to sell. In the '40s, most comic titles were listed as quarterlies, the intent being to have the retailer keep them on the stands for three months before returning them. Also, since the cover date on a magazine is generally considered the off-sale date, publishers post-dated their comics past all limits of rationality, to the point that December titles came out during the summer. Unfortunately, dealers in need of space for new product often returned titles that were only a week old.

The pulp publishers' solution to the return problem was to adopt a new publishing format that was not periodical, the paperback book. Paperbacks had been bubbling up on the horizon since as long ago as 1939. It was then that Pocket Books released the first American paperback (*Lost Horizon*, if you're interested). Published by Robert de Graff and half-owned by the prestigious Simon and Schuster publishing house, Pocket Books offered a wide variety of reprints of hard covered books at a super-low 25 cent cover price. Originally, de Graff tried to sell these inexpensive substitutes for real books through book stores and through the Sears, Roebuck catalog company. Not until he signed contracts with the magazine wholesalers to distribute his paperbacks to newsstands in 1941 did they catch on, however.

Paperbacks were welcomed by the newsstands because they weren't dated. They didn't have to be turned over as often as magazines, reducing handling and labor costs. Readers preferred them to the pulps because they provided complete, novel-length, unserialized stories and didn't fall apart as fast. A paperback "book" had the illusion of permanence. Publishers loved the fact that, since paperbacks weren't dated, even those that the newsstands did return could be shipped elsewhere, while a returned magazine was scrap paper. On top of that, they could be reprinted. Reprintings of popular titles were guaranteed 100% sell-through. Publishers were able to use this backlist of proven sellers to provide the profit cushion needed to take a chance on new writers.

Most of the new paperback publishers were refugees from the pulp wars. Seeing a solution to the magazine return problem, they flocked to the new format. Even many comic publishers jumped on the bandwagon. George Delacourte switched his attention from Dell Comics to Dell Books and made more off of *Peyton Place* than he ever did off of *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*. Fawcett Publications made so much money from its Gold Medal paperback line that comic books began to seem like a petty annoyance. Captain Marvel had made millions for Fawcett in the '40s, but they'd had to fight continuing legal battles with National Comics over alleged copyright infringement. Fawcett settled out of court and dropped not only the Captain but their entire line of comics.

Other comic magazine publishers



also joined in, but some did not succeed. If Martin Goodman's Lion Books line hadn't been such a disaster he might never have started Marvel Comics. Only DC, which had never published anything but comics, seemed immune to the lure of the paperback.

Of course, since the main place that paperbacks were sold was on the same newsstands that were already overcrowded with comics and pulps, it was clear that something had to give. Since the paperbacks were preferrred by the retailers, their success lead inevitably to the decline of the old magazines, including the comics.

But it wasn't only pulps and comics that were affected. Many prestigious weeklies like *Collier's* folded. The collapse of these magazines caused a chain reaction. Publishers that could not pay their bills couldn't give credit to distributors, who then folded, dragging down other publishers by not paying their own bills. The collapse of Leader News was as much responsible for the death of EC's horror comics as the Comics Code Authority. One of the companies which barely managed to survive was Marvel. They had to cut almost 75% of their titles in order to find space with a new distributor.

On top of these problems, by the early '60s the newsstands themselves were disappearing! Financed by the GI Bill, Americans were moving to the suburbs in record numbers and changing their retail shopping habits. The corner newsstand and neighborhood store began to fade out in favor of the shopping mall. The new, large store designs made it impossible to monitor reading and loitering problems. Magazines were therefore restricted to the few that could be squeezed directly in front of the cash registers. The wave of magazine collapses that had begun in the '50s crested in the '60s. The only way to survive in the suburbs was through subscriptions. *Life* and *Look* soon bankrupted themselves through subscription price wars, trying to maintain circulation and advertising.

The paperbacks escaped this fate by finding a new mode of distribution, the bookstore. Between 1960 and 1980, the number of bookstores in America increased from 1400 to 14,000. Despite the specter of the dying magazines, reading seemed to be more popular than ever. To fill that demand, most of the old pulp writers were recruited to churn out paperback originals. Their pulp efforts were also recycled into novels, generating a continuing royalty income on material that they had originally considered to be long forgotten.

The comic publishers were less successful, however. The new bookstores were not interested in handling magazines, particularly such low profit ones as comics. The baby boom and the *Batman* TV show provided a major boost in reader interest during the '60s, but that interest had to contend with dwindling retail outlets. Smaller publishers couldn't get distributors to display their titles at all, and so didn't survive.

Comic publishers searched for a way to either: 1) stop 70% of their comics from being returned unsold, or 2) print them so cheaply that they could afford to throw away two thirds of the print run. They tried different sizes and page counts in order to get more newsstand exposure. They pushed subscriptions in order to bypass newsstands altogether. They tried bagging two or three comics together and selling them in toy stores. They pioneered new, cheaper (and worse) printing techniques and introduced poorer and poorer grades of paper.

Finally, in the early '70s, the publishers resorted to selling comics through specialty stores. These stores had originated as collectibles shops and looked upon new comics as a leader to get customers in to look at their back issues. The publishers sold their books to these dealers outright, eliminating the return problem. Profits climbed because the publisher knew exactly how many comics he was going to sell before he printed them, and the dealer knew he would eventually sell every copy he bought, either new or as a collectible. By the mid-'80s, more than half of all comics sales occurred through these stores.

It looked like a good plan, but it eventually collapsed on itself. The unsold comics the publishers couldn't get rid of were still there, only now the retailer was stuck with them. Soon dealers found themselves buried in unsaleable-at-any-price comics, created by an incredible influx of new publishers jumping on the bandwagon of "guaranteed" sales. Unable to meet the COD on new shipments, failing dealers drove the new publishers into bankruptcy. The nightmare of the '50s had returned.

The boom turned into a bust as dealers cut back sharply on orders. Many ordered only as many copies as they could pre-sell to steady customers. Since titles were no longer stocked in depth, those titles that rose in popularity over time soon were commanding back issues prices 10-50 times higher than cover. The newly volatile market attracted speculators whose only interest in comics was a quick profit. In order to boost their share of a declining market, many publishers resorted to manufacturing "collectibles" aimed at just these people. All kinds of stunts were tried to convince the new speculators that *their* product was the one that would increase in value, and therefore deserved to be purchased in bulk.

The real problem, however, was the inability of retailers and publishers to adjust supply to meet demand. Either stores ordered too many copies, in which case publishers prospered while stores drowned in unsold merchandise, or books were under-ordered, in which case retailers made a fortune on back issue speculators and publishers went out of business due to low initial sales.

The obvious solution to this problem is the same on the pulps used in the '50s. Paperback reprints. While the pulp magazine publishers flourished by switching to non-periodical paperbacks, the comic publisher floundered by switching to non-returnable magazines. The decision to concentrate on specialty stores resulted in a continued dwindling of audience size, as more and more books were sold to fewer and fewer readers.

Taking comics out of the specialty stores and putting them back where the general public can see them is the only way to revitalize the industry. Since the newsstands are gone now, and there are no more neighborhood stores, the only way to do this is through bookstores. And the only way to get into bookstores is to sell books.

Publishers have recently begun to do just this. Already, an uncountable number of reprint collections have been published. These new "graphic novels" are kept in print, allowing publishers to satisfy demand. The rewards of continued popularity go to the creators through royalties rather than speculators through outrageous back issue prices.

Fannish acceptance of these reprints has so far been mixed, probably because the collectors' mentality requires one copy of each new edition. Once fans get out from under this shibboleth, however, they will realize the tremendous economic advantage they gain by moving into the paperback market. No longer will they be required to buy every new title on the day of release or risk paying speculators' prices. Instead, they can budget their purchases and buy only what they can read at one time, content to know that the other items will still be there at cover price when they want them.

The choices available to publishers who want a future are few. Either switch to the more stable book format or continue to try to eke out an existence as creators of collectible curiosities sold mostly to speculators.

The handwriting is on the wall for those 32-page newsprint pamphlets we've come to know as comics. I won't miss them, will you? ●

NEWSLINE

ECLIPSE'S *TRUE CRIME* CARDS ATTACKED IN STATE GOVERNMENTS

Eclipse's planned *True Crime* trading card series has sparked angry action in three states. The unusual attention given to the card set is probably due to the largely negative coverage it received on the syndicated news show *Entertainment Tonight* (1/28/92), and on NBC's *Today Show* (2/3/92) and *The Maury Povich Show* (2/3/92).

According to a press release from Eclipse Comics, twelve Michigan State Senators offered two identically-worded resolutions "urging Eclipse Enterprises to cease publishing and selling its *True Crime* series of trading cards" and "requesting Michigan retail stores to refuse to carry these cards."

The Michigan resolution stated that "This product is aimed at children at a time when trading cards are more popular than ever before," and "placing infamous, vicious murderers such as Ted Bundy and Henry Lee Lucas on trading card racks, along with children's true heroes, is deplorable."

A copy of the resolution was sent to Eclipse, which released a response that stated, "No representative of the state senators contacted the Eclipse office prior to wasting taxpayer time and money on these ill-considered resolutions, so it is not surprising that the information they contain is highly inaccurate."

The response pointed out that the cards heve not been released yet; that they do not depict just murderers, but "a multitude of figures on both sides of the law;" that the only victims listed are those connected with such well-known crimes as the Lindbergh kidnapping; that they no more glorify criminal acts than magazines, articles, books, or TV shows about crime; and that they are not aimed at children but "baby boom" adults.

There was also a detailed answer to a specific clause in the resolution, that publisher Dean Mullaney "would not have started such a venture if his wife or child had been brutally murdered." The Eclipse release stated, "for the record, his wife Catherine Yronwode —a co-owner of Eclipse Enterprises and the editor of the *True Crimes* cards in question—was brutally raped at knife-point in 1964, in Berkeley, California, yet she was a joint instigator of this venture." The response also pointed out that Yronwode had lost Lithuanian relatives at the hands of the regimes of Stalin and Hitler, but that Eclipse still put out cards on them.

Maryland & Arkansas

Similar bans on the Eclipse cards have apparently been proposed by state legislators in Maryland and Arkansas. No further news was available on the Arkansas proposal at presstime.

Maryland House of Delegates member Elizabeth Smith has introduced a bill to ban the sale, advertising or distribution of card sets featuring the likenesses of convicted criminals. Such a law would prevent Diamond (based in Baltimore, largest distributor of non-sports cards) from carrying any such products. The bill was later amended to restrict the sale of the cards only to minors.

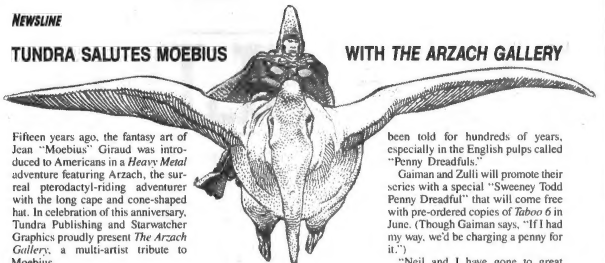
California

Meanwhile, the city of the city of Rosemead, California, citing "a recent surge in California of the distribution of 'trading cards' depicting the likenesses of convicted mass murderers," has unanimously passed a resolution urging the California legislature to prohibit the production of all "materials depicting the likenesses of convicted felons." Eclipse pointed out that the resolution could be applied to all printed media, not just comics.

Ironically, though the Eclipse series covers many different types of crimes, card sets focusing on mass murderers have already been released by different companies, such as Shel-Tone Publications' *Bloody Visions* card set. None of these sets has been known to have triggered any public response. ●

Eclipse's *True Crime* trading cards have provoked strong reactions.

TUNDRA SALUTES MOEBIUS WITH *THE ARZACH GALLERY*



Fifteen years ago, the fantasy art of Jean "Moebius" Giraud was introduced to Americans in a *Heavy Metal* adventure featuring Arzach, the surreal pterodactyl-riding adventurer with the long cape and cone-shaped hat. In celebration of this anniversary, Tundra Publishing and Starwatcher Graphics proudly present *The Arzach Gallery*, a multi-artist tribute to Moebius.

Each of the six 8½" by 11" galleries includes 8 high-quality color prints by different artists, as well as a four-page chapter of a new Arzach adventure written by Randy and Jean-Marc Lofficier (the U.S. editors and translators of Moebius' work) and illustrated by Moebius himself.

The first collection features a cover by Mike Mignola, with contributions by Charles Vess, Paul Chadwick, Joe Kubert, Bryan Talbot, Wendy Pini, Katsuhiro Otomo, and William Stout.

Legends of Arzach: The Arzach Gallery Two has a cover by Kelly Freas, plus contributions by Eric Shanower, Kevin O'Neill, Will Eisner, Leo Duranona, Mike Zeck, Jaime Hernandez, and Michael Zulli. Contributing artists to future galleries include Mike Ploog, Sergio Aragones, Miyazaki, Walt Simonson, Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave Gibbons, Norm Breyfogle, Jon J. Muth, Gahan Wilson, Stan Sakai, Steve Bissette, and Kevin Eastman.

"I am incredibly grateful to all who have responded enthusiastically to this project," said Moebius. "Each artist has produced a unique and wonderful vision of the character."

Though Arzach hit the U.S. in 1977, he first appeared in France in 1974. Moebius, already popular there as western artist illustrator Jean Giraud, took a new approach with Arzach. "When I drew *Arzach*, I was trying to draw what exists on the deepest level of consciousness, what lies just on the edge of the subconscious mind," said Moebius.

"We have tried to recapture the feeling of ancient folk tales, the picaresque legends that medieval troubadours told as they traveled through Europe," said Lofficier. "Arzach is a character straight from the collective unconscious, and you can only do him justice if you draw on the same archetypal material that was used by Chaucer, Rabelais, Cervantes and the like."

A special preview of the *Arzach* galleries will run in the July issue of *Heavy Metal* (recently purchased by Tundra publisher Eastman), on sale in May.

Sweeney Todd

Neil Gaiman and Michael Zulli, who have collaborated on DC's popular *Sandman* title, have joined forces on *Sweeney Todd*, which will be serialized this fall in *Taboo*.

Sweeney Todd, the "Demon Barber of Fleet Street" who cut the throats of his rich customers for their wealth, is is one the most popular villains in the history of England. His story, which often involves Mrs. Lovett, a baker who supposedly used his victims' corpses for her meat pies, has been told for hundreds of years, especially in the English pulps called "Penny Dreadfuls."

Gaiman and Zulli will promote their series with a special "Sweeney Todd Penny Dreadful" that will come free with pre-ordered copies of *Taboo 6* in June. (Though Gaiman says, "If I had my way, we'd be charging a penny for it.")

"Neil and I have gone to great lengths to research this story to the hilt," Zullis said. "We hope to do something really unusual with the project, allowing the story to change a little each time we do it."

Crow

One third of *The Crow #*1 did not pass Tundra's quality inspection, and had to be returned to the printer. A second printing should be available by this time.

Meanwhile, Tundra has a special "Who-Can-Sell-The-Most" contest. The retailer who sells the most issues of *Crow #*1-3 will win a leather jacket with art by *Crow* artist James O'Barr. ●

Above: Arzach. Below: Neil Gaiman and Michael Zulli's *Sweeney Todd*.

MARVEL STOCK DROPS AFTER NEGATIVE COVERAGE IN *BARRON'S*

The departure of some of Marvel's hottest fan-favorite artists, among other factors, has shaken Wall Street's faith in the House of Ideas.

Marvel's stock dropped $11.375 a share to $54.625 after a Feb. 17 *Barron's* published an article questioning its growth potential and reported the departure of such artists as Rob Liefeld, Erik Larsen, and Todd McFarlane to form Image. The main point of the article was that, though Marvel is doing better than ever before, its growth potential appears limited, and thus it might not be a good investment.

The article pointed out that even though Marvel's stock nearly quadrupled in value over seven months, its "net tangible book value is a negative 28 million, or a deficit of $2.30 a share." It also noted that Marvel's Fourth-quarter earnings were down significantly from its Third quarter.

Barron's said that such a loss might be tolerable if not for what it cited as Marvel's limited growth potential. "Marvel has wrung about as much out of the market as possible. . . The growth potential in [advertising and licensing] is virtually exhausted. Prices have peaked. Unit growth has stalled. The universe of potential licensees has been depopulated."

Barron's reporter Douglas A. Kass wrote, "Visiting a dozen specialty comic book stores—the kind that account for the large bulk of Marvel's sales—I saw boxes upon boxes filled with unsold copies of the premiere issues of *X-Men* and *X-Force*—titles that were introduced nearly six months ago." He said retailers are complaining that "consumers are no longer willing to keep shelling out anywhere from $1.50 to $2.95 for a comic book."

The reporter judged Marvel's many recent marketing gimmicks, including "special" covers done to woo collectors, as "the kind of tactics that usually signal the end of a marketing move, not its beginning."

Among the other clouds on Marvel's horizon, according to the article: it is dependent on three distributors—Diamond, Capital, and Heroes World—for over 50% of its publishing revenues, and could suffer if any one of them has troubles; and nearly 80% of Marvel's publishing revenue comes from direct market specialty stores "which are inherently vulnerable in today's soft retail environment." Of course, all comic book companies are dependent on direct market distributors and retailers, but only Marvel is publicly traded.

The article concluded, "Viewed against a backdrop of dwindling licensing opportunities, consumer resistance to higher prices, increasing competitive pressure, and a dismal balance sheet, Marvel begins to look distressingly like one of its own musclebound characters: over-inflated and due for a fall.

"Ker-Splash!"

The *Barron's* article was followed by reports on Image in the *L.A. Times* and on CNN.

In the *Times* article, Marvel called the *Barron's* article "inaccurate and misleading," pointing out that its earnings were up 267% for the fourth quarter and 196% for the full year of 1991. Marvel President Terry Stewart said the loss of the Image artists was not as big as was being reported, because "the importance of the creative people is still secondary to the characters."

In the February 29 *New York Times*, Stewart questioned the resolve of the Image artists, most of whom have stated that they will no longer work for Marvel. "Basically, they come, they go, and they come back again.

"There is a great amount of fluidity, and one artist may have products in the marketplace from two different companies. Some of them are already talking about projects that they will do for us in 1993." The article did not say which artists Perelman was referring to. ●

FROM FANTAGRAPHICS: *SLEEPYHEAD TALE, LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE: 1934*

The following titles are scheduled to ship from Fantagraphics in June.

Imagine the adventures of a grown-up Little Nemo and you have an idea of what Jeremy Eaton's *A Sleepyhead Tale* is about. Sleepyhead, the book's idealistic protagonist, survives every trial and indignity (physical, psychological, and sexual) imaginable to modern humanity. This all-ages book has an introduction by Jim Woodring.

Fantagraphics jumps on the biographical bandwagon with *The Six Three Stooges*, a history of America's most famous two-reeler stars, from Fox Comix and cartoonist Ian Eddy. In July, the life of Elvis Presley will be recounted.

Orphan Annie claimed by phony parents! Daddy Warbucks destitute! Can anyone save them? Find out in *Little Orphan Annie: 1934*, with an introduction by R.C. Harvey.

In Eros: The cast of Anton Drek's *Forbidden Frankenstein* series returns in *Dracula's Daughter #*2, with a cameo by Wendy Whitebread. The fourth Eros graphic novel is *Two Hot Girls on a Hot Summer Night*, by

Terry Hooper and Art Wetherell. Joseph Baker retells a medieval folk tale in *The Tale of Halima #*1.

There's a trio of erotic super-heroes. Swedish cartoonist Mikael Oskarsson introduces a naked super-heroine in *The Exhibitionist #*1. Grass Green does a repressed hero in *The Decorator #*1, and Mike "*Cadaver*a" McCarthy introduces *Bang Gang*. ●

CATWOMAN DEFIANT AND PENGUIN TRIUMPHANT COMING FROM DC

June is Batman month at DC. Is anyone surprised? Here's a *partial* listing of the Bat-stuff you can read while standing in line at the movies.

Gothic, Grant Morrison and Klaus Janson's popular storyline from *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight*, becomes a 128-page trade paperback. Batman teams up with Gotham's criminal element to track down a brutal serial killer.

A pair of specials spotlight the villains of *Batman Returns*. The Catwoman becomes a pawn in a plot to capture a crime boss in *Catwoman Defiant* by Peter Milligan, Tom Grindberg, and Dick Giordano. Can Batman save her? *Should* he save her? Meanwhile, the Penguin watches a '60s television advertising executive by Burgess Meredith and hatches a brilliant new scheme; he's going to go legit. That's in *Penguin Triumphant* by John Ostrander, Joe Staton, and Robin Smith. The covers of these two 48-page books combine to form a painted poster by Brian Stelfreeze.

DC promises readers that the new volume of *Batman: Dark Knight Archives Volume 1* "initiates a new process which allows an even greater fidelity to the source material." The 288-page hardcover collects issues

Above: *Catwoman Triumphant*. Below: DC's big cross-over series will star Eclipso.

#1-4 of the Golden Age *Batman*.

Doug Moench and Kelley Jones' *Batman: Red Rain* will become available as a 96-page trade paperback.

Eclipso Annuals

As you can see from this issue's "Coming Distractions," DC intends to establish Eclipso as its most powerful and deadly villain, relegating Darkseid to infrequent battles with Brother Power the Geek.

May's *Eclipso: The Darkness Within* #1 will be continued in the following annuals: *Superman: The Man of Steel Annual* #1, *Green Lantern Annual* #1, *Detective Comics Annual* #5, *Superman Annual* #5, *Justice League America Annual* #6, *The Demon Annual* #1, *Green Arrow Annual* #5, *Flash Annual* #5, *Action Comics Annual* #4, *Hawkworld Annual* #3, *Robin Annual* #1, *Deathstroke Annual* #1, *New Titans Annual* #8, *L.E.G.I.O.N. Annual* #3, *Batman Annual* #16, and *Adventures of Superman Annual* #3. The storyline will then be concluded in *Eclipso: The Darkness Within* #2.

Finally, wacky *Doom Patrol* writer Grant Morrison (we call him "wacky" 'cause he *hates* that) serves up a lampoon of Marvel's *X-Force* in the *Doom Force Special* #1, illustrated by everyone you can think of who isn't Rob Liefeld. ●

SPIDERFEMME, COMIC CHRONICLES AMONG NEW PERSONALITY TITLES

Citing its success in recent months, Personality is introducing even *more* imprints to its line.

Spoof Comics' first title is *Spiderfemme*, featuring a cover by fan favorite Adam Hughes. Fred Hembeck contributes a four-page origin story with "an incredible centerspread." Like a lot of titles from this company, it includes a trading card.

Spoof Cards' first product will be 36-card Bogus Baseball set, featuring parodies of popular ball players, "strictly limited to 10,000 sets." Personality calls this "The hottest trading card parody since *Garbage Pail Kids*," which is a pretty big achievement when you consider that it isn't even going to be available 'til June.

Spoof Stuff will produce merchandise based on Spoof Comics and Spoof Cards products. Its first products will be a Spiderfemme T-shirt by Adam Hughes and a Swollen Cryin' parody shirt by Juan Pineda.

Comic Chronicles will be a monthly book examining the history and collectibility of various comic book series. The first issue features the Ghost Rider.

Cutting Edger Productions is Personality's new "alternative" line. *Hell: Princess of Darkness* #1 is hosted by the Princess herself, with stories by Jim Balent, Scott Harrison, and others. A young wizard seeks revenge for his father's death in *El Mago Volume 1: The Wizard*, by Quique Alcatena, inker of Tim Truman's *Spider* comic.

Real Life Comics' *Vets* #1 features the real experiences of Jack Mauro, a veteran of the Vietnam war. Future issues will tell the real life stories of other veterans. *Healthman* is an educational comic about AIDs.

In Personality: *Rolling Stones: The Sixties* #1 begins a three-part series on the most successful caucasians ever to do R&B.

In Celebrity: John Tartaglione and popular inker Joe Sinnott present *Joe Dimaggio* #1, a color biography of the famous baseball player who's now known primarily for having married Marilyn Monroe. Also in color is *Madonna: Her Music* #1, a chronicle of the singer's career, and *Metallica* #1.

In Friendly and Adult: *Bambi in Heat* #1, *XXX-Women: Phallus Rising* #1, *Female Fantasies* #1, *College Girls* #1, and *Bad Girls* #1. The last three are all by Jim Balent, the busiest artist this side of Barry Blair. ●

INTEREST IN *BATMAN RETURNS*, X-MEN, ZEN TOYS BIG AT 1992 TOY FAIR

The March 1992 *Internal Correspondence* reported on the special *Batman Returns* party at the 1992 Toy Fair in New York City. It was held at the Ritz, with 100 guests viewing promotional films for *Batman Returns* and the upcoming cartoon show. The cartoon show is reportedly very inspired by the Superman cartoons produced by the Fleischer Studios in the '40s. Outside, crowds viewed a parked Batmobile and a Batsignal projected onto the building across the street.

Grotesque gargoyle props from the film were also visible, and there was a long fashion show of Batman-licensed clothes. This time, the items went beyond the usual T-shirts to a Catwoman-based women's fashion line which included miniskirts and evening gowns. *Internal Correspondence* reporter Tom Flinn called the Catwoman fashions "especially enjoyable."

And there was a lot of *Batman Returns* stuff at the Toy Fair. Kenner now has the major Batman Toy License, taking over from Toy Biz. Applause will be releasing a Batman PVC set, and Ertl has models and die cast toys ready. Other licensed toy lines promoted include X-Men (now being touted as a separate entity from the Marvel super-hero line), Fish Police, Zen, and Star Trek: The Next Generation.

Meanwhile, Surge Entertainment's proclaimed Zen the biggest hit of the show. A press release from Zen Comics said that Zen's "five appearance" drew bigger crowds than Magic Johnson or the stars of *Beverly Hills 90210*, who were promoting toys of their own. The release said that Zen has been called "The Next Turtles" in *Toy & Hobby World* and "a monster license" in *Licensing Book*.

"What we did for "ninja" with the Turtles, I think we're going to for the environment with Zen," said Surge president Mark Freedman. ●

DISNEY DIRECTOR JACK KINNEY DIES; *CHESTER CHEETAH SHOW* ATTACKED

COMICS ADS ON TV: Retailers have been running DC and Marvel-made commercials with considerable success. "We ran the DC commercial during the *Star Trek* marathon . . and we had such great response we decided to continue television advertising," said Westfield Comics manager Bob Moreau. So far, the most popular slot for advertising are on science fiction and fantasy shows, especially *Star Trek*.

* * *

EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE *CREEPY*: According to the March, 1992 *Internal Correspondence* from Capital City, the rights to *Creepy* and *Eerie* are in dispute. Apple Press reportedly notified Capital City that it has filed trademark applications for *Creepy* and *Eerie*. The Warren trademarks, according to Capital City, have expired. The two titles are currently being handled by Harris Publications, which is releasing the books through Dark Horse.

* * *

EMPHASIS ON "WORSE": Child abuse, an unusual subject for syndicated cartoon strips, is appearing in the pages of Lynn Johnston's *For Better or For Worse*. After the characters

Child abuse is discussed in *For Better or Worse*.

I HIT MY CHEEK, AND I BROKE MY GLASSES. NOTHING SERIOUS, OK?
OK
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENED, MIKE?
WE WENT OVER TO HIS PLACE AT CHRISTMAS, BRIAN -- THEY NEVER PUT UP ANY LIGHTS !!
Lynn

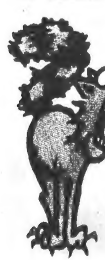
LET ME SHOW YOU AROUND OUR SCHOOL, MR. PRESIDENT
THAT'S OUR GYM... THERE'S THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE... AND THIS IS OUR CAFETERIA!
JOEY HAUK
I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND IT TO ANYONE WITH A WEAK STOMACH THOUGH!
VERY FUNNY
© 1992 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

A new low! Barf jokes in *Nancy!*

Michael Patterson and his friend Gordon got in trouble for trying to drive the Patterson's family car, Gordon showed up with on the bus with a bandage on his face and a story about falling off his porch. Johnston says future strips will deal with the parents' perspective. "You bend the rules from the comic strip format. If you don't include this sort of thing, you're not including life the way it is."

* * *

JACK KINNEY DIES: Award-winning animation director Jack Kinney died on March 4 of natural causes. The 82-year-old Kinney's credits included "Der Fuehrer's Face," the anti-Hitler Donald Duck vehicle which won the 1943 Oscar for best animated short. Kinney started as an animator at Disney in 1931, and had moved to directing by the late '30s, directing sequences in *Pinocchio, Dumbo, The Reluctant Dragon, Saludos Amigos, Victory Through Air Power, The Three Caballeros, Make Mine Music, Fun and Fancy Free,* and *Melody Time,* as well as the Goofy "How To" series in the '40s and '50s. He went on to form Jack Kinney Productions, which produced television Popeye cartoons and the UPA Mr. Magoo feature, *1001 Arabian Nights.* He also wrote several books on the early days of animation, including *Walt Disney and Assorted Other Characters.*



Rip Off lives! . . .after all.

* * *

GEORGE AND NANCY: The February 17-29 *Nancy* strips, featuring a special sequence in which George Bush visited Nancy's school, were sent to the President himself before they appeared in newspapers. When the President read the Feb. 22 strip in which Nancy addresses him as "Your Georgeness," he sent cartoonist Jerry Scott a handwritten note reading, "His Georgeness loved it."

* * *

CHEETAH SHOW RUNS INTO TROUBLE: According to a report in *The New York Times,* Several children's organizations, including Action for Children's Television, filed a petition with the Federal Communications Commission. The petition asks for a delcaratory ruling that *Yo! It's the Chester Cheetah Show!,* which was being pitched to Fox Television, would be no more than a "program-length commercial." The proposed show would star a character created specifically to sell Chee-tos snacks to children. "A child doesn't know if a character was created first for a comic book or a book or a toy or a logo," countered Fox Children's Network president Margaret Loesch. Interestingly, it would not be the first animated cartoon show featuring advertising cartoon characters. The 1964 show *Linus the Lion Hearted* starred the mascots of Post Cereals.

* * *

RIP OFF IS ON: Rip Off Press was quick to correct a trade publication's headline stating, "Rip Off to Cease Publication." Rip Off said it has been doing well ever since it relocated to Auburn, California from San Francisco in 1987. "ROP's annual sales rose by nearly 45% between 1988 and 1991, and posted a gain of 8% last year even as major corporations were reporting huge losses," said a company press release.

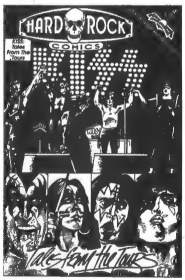
* * *

COMIC BOOKS AS ART: "Comic Book Art—The Creator's and Publisher's View" was a panel presentation scheduled for March 13 at the University of Maine. Co-sponsored by the University of Maine and Tundra Publishing, the panelists scheduled included Stephen Bissette, Scott McCloud, and Tundra managing Editor Greg Baisden.

* * *

COLLECTION ROBBED: A collection of 3,000 comic books was stolen from the home of Zerina Wilson of Jasper, Alabama. The collection, which was estimated to be worth $4,500, included *Adventures of Superboy* #300, featuring the first appearance of the Legion of Super-Heroes. "It might take a super-hero to get these books back," Ms. Wilson said.

* * *



KISS AND TELL: Revolutionary Publisher Todd Loren and writer Spike Steffenhagen met with the rock group Kiss on February 27 at the request of Kiss's management, who wanted as accurate a portrayal of the band as possible in *Hard Rock Comics #5,* which will also feature the band's new look. "We're still unauthorized and proud of it," said Loren. "The band is cooperating, which is something we welcome, but we neither seek nor accept authorization from anyone."

* * *

CANADIAN CENSORSHIP LAW UPHELD: According to a report in *The New York Times,* on February 27 the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the obscenity provision of the criminal code, ruling that although the anti-pornography law infringes on the freedom of expression, it is legitimate to suppress materials that are judged to harm women. The ruling bodes ill for any Canadian trying to fight the censorship of comics in that country. "[U.S.] laws don't consider the harm to women," said University of Michigan Law professor Catherine A. MacKinnon, who helped write the brief, "but in Canada it will now be materials that subordinate, degrade, or dehumanize women that are obscene." Ms. MacKinnon and others have attempted similar ordinances in the U.S., mostly without success, and often with the opposition of feminist leaders like Betty Friedan, who consider such measures censorship.

* * *

LIZARD LICENSE: Alan Jude Sumna and Glenn Boyd, co-creators of the comic *Interplanetary Lizards of the Texas Plains,* have entered into a licensing agreement with Toy Headquarters of California. Toy Headquarters is developing a Nintendo video game based on the Lizards for 1993, as well as action figures and a board game. The creators are also negotiating to have *Lizards* turned into an animated series.

* * *

NUTHEADS: Former *Mad* cartoonist Don Martin has entered a new field: the comic strip. *The Nutheads,* featuring an incompetent family and their brainy dog, is running in the Lakeland *Ledger* of Florida, Martin's home state.

* * *

KRAUSE: Krause Publications, publisher of *Comics Buyer's Guide,* got a feature story in the "Money" section of the February 11 *USA Today.* Krause was founded by Chet Krause, who started in 1957 with *Numismatic News,* a publication for coin collectors like himself. Today, Krause publications publish a vast array of trade publications for collectors. *CBG* editors Don and Maggie Thompson were pictured sitting in a pile of comic books and were quoted in the article. Krause, who is retired, collects coins and World War II equipment. ●

COMICS BESTSELLERS—MARCH

All figures from the March, 1992 Capital City *Internal Correspondence* newsletter. Figures represent direct market retail orders. Numbers in parentheses ( ) represent a title's overall position on the charts.

TOP TEN COMICS (TOTAL $$$)

(The comics with the highest orders in terms of $$$ spent)

1. Ghost Rider #25 . . . . . Marvel
2. X-Men Annual #1 . . . . . Marvel
3. Incredible Hulk #393 . . . . . Marvel
4. X-Force Annual #1 . . . . . Marvel
5. Uncanny X-Men Annual #1 . . . . . Marvel
6. X-Men #8 . . . . . Marvel
7. Spider-Man #22 . . . . . Marvel
8. X-Force #10 . . . . . Marvel
9. Uncanny X-Men #288 . . . . . Marvel
10. X-Factor Annual #7 . . . . . Marvel

TOP TEN COMICS (CIRCULATION)

(The comics with the most issues ordered)

1. X-Men #8 . . . . . Marvel
2. X-Force #10 . . . . . Marvel
3. Uncanny X-Men #288 . . . . . Marvel
4. X-Men Annual #1 . . . . . Marvel
5. Ghost Rider #25 . . . . . Marvel
6. X-Force Annual #1 . . . . . Marvel
7. Lobo's Back #1 . . . . . DC
8. Uncanny X-Men Annual #16 . . . . . Marvel
9. Incredible Hulk #393 . . . . . Marvel
10. Spider-Man #22 . . . . . Marvel

TOP TEN INDEPENDENT COMICS (CIRC.)

1 (19). Youngblood #2 . . . . . Malibu
2 (35). Aliens: Hive #2 . . . . . Dark Horse
3 (36). Terminators: Hunters #1 . . . . . Dark Horse
4 (42). Next Men #2 . . . . . Dark Horse
5 (94). Hard Boiled #3 . . . . . Dark Horse
6 (96). Dark Shadows #1 . . . . . Innovation
7 (102). Thing #2 . . . . . Dark Horse
8 (107). Young Indiana Jones #2 . . . . . Dark Horse
9 (109). Solar #10 . . . . . Voyager
10 (110). Magnus #10 . . . . . Voyager

TOP TEN BLACK & WHITE COMICS (CIRC.)

1 (140). Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles #45 . . . . Mirage
2 (142). Dark Horse Presents #60 . . . . . Dark Horse
3 (150). Creepy #1 . . . . . Dark Horse
4 (157). Savage Sword of Conan #197 . . . . . Marvel
5 (176). Cerebus #158 . . . . . Aardvaark-Vanaheim
6 (181). Love & Rockets #38 . . . . . Fantagraphics
7 (184). Faust Act Two . . . . . Rebel Studios
8 (188). Wendy Whitebread #2 . . . . . Fantagraphics
9 (189). Cry For Dawn Volume VII . . . Cry For Dawn
10 (193). Usagi Yojimbo #34 . . . . . Fantagraphics

TOP PUBLISHERS/MARKET SHARES

1. Marvel 52.87%
2. DC 17.86%
3. Dark Horse 5.98%
4. Malibu 3.06%
5. Valiant 1.65%
6. Innovation 1.32%
7. Eclipse 1.06%
8. Viz 0.90%
9. Comico 0.85%
10. Fantagraphics 0.85%

TOP BOOKS ($$$)

1 (65). Elfquest: Kings of the Broken Wheel . . . WaRP
2 (71). Cerebus: Church & State . . Aardvark-Vanaheim
3 (85). Spider-Man Masterworks 1 . . . . . Marvel
4 (95). Daredevil Gang War . . . . . Marvel

Marvel surpassed 50% again, but without the help of a blockbuster first issue. Instead, it was the X-Men Annuals that pushed Marvel over the top. DC continues to stagnate, but might recover when *Batman Returns* premieres.

IN JUNE: DARK HORSE'S *JAMES BOND*, EISNER'S *INVISIBLE PEOPLE*

Archie: *Zen Intergalactic Ninja* will become an ongoing title. The first issue features the origin of Zen, plus beginning of the multi-part epic, "Rumble in the Rain Forest!" Plus, each direct market copy will contain a free poster by Jim Fern. Steve Stern is the writer, and Ross Andru and Mike Esposito are the artists.

Michael Gallagher and Doug Crane are the creative team behind *Betty* #1, her first solo comic.

Dark Horse: Matt Wagner's *Grendel* returns in August with a ten-part series subtitled *Warchild*. Wagner will write and ink the series. Pat McEowan will pencil, Bernie Mireault will use the animation-style coloring he introduced in Epic's *Everyman*, and Simon Bisley will paint the covers.

The three-issue *James Bond: Serpent's Tooth* series will debut in June, and is the first of a series of Bond books planned by Dark Horse. The 48-page squarebound book is by Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy.

Chris Claremont will write a 12-part *Aliens Vs. Predator* series sometime in 1992. No other information is known yet.

An *Eerie* trade paperback will reprint the best of the original series, including artists Wally Wood and Reed Crandell. In addition to its Warren revivals, Harris Publications (distributed by Dark Horse) also plans to introduce some new titles for the '90s.

Eclipse: More on Eclipse's FX line, which will feature big screen-type adventure. *Retaliator: Final Justice* is described as a suspenseful tale of unchecked murder. Valarie Jones, Davis Ammerman, and Gary Yap are the creative team.

Blood is the Harvest is about a hidden race of vampires who'll do anything to survive. They're opposed by a team of assassins who've been trained by a mysterious benefactor.

The *Life of Death* graphic novel adapts one of Clive Barker's most popular short stories. It's about a woman who fears death so much that she seeks to create a perfect death for herself. Fred Burke and Stewart Stanyard will adapt it.

Evolution: Evolution has announced a second printing of *Dangerous Times #1*. A press release from the company said that considerable media attention (including T.M. Maple's review column in *Amazing Heroes* #196) helped increase the magazine's sales.

Harvey: The Harvey Giant Specials of last summer were so successful that the company plans to make use of the format twice a year. The price of the 64-page specials will also go down to $2.25 an issue. Most of the Harvey stars, including its new Hanna Barbera characters, will get specials.

Image: Some of the titles following the smash Rob Liefeld *Youngblood* series are: Erik Larsen's *The Dragon*, featuring a one-man S.W.A.T. team; Valentino's *The Pact*, about a team of young heroes striking out on their own; and Rob Liefeld and Marat Mychals' *Brigade*, about another group of super-heroes. For more news, check the Image feature next issue.

Kitchen Sink: Will Eisner's next project after acclaimed *To the Heart of the Storm* is *Invisible People*, portraying the isolation of people in the city of today. Unlike *Heart*, however, *Invisible People* is being released as a comic series. The first issue, subtitled *Sanctum*, concerns a living man who becomes officially dead in the eyes of the city. It will be followed in July and August by two more issues, subtitled *The Power* and *Mortal Combat*.

Will Eisner's new project.

The *Li'l Abner Series* will shrink slightly in size and drop greatly in price beginning with Volumes 13 & 14. The new price for the books will be $6.95 softcover and $24.95 hardcover.

Mark Schultz's *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* collection is going into a fourth printing.

Night Wynd: In Barry Blair's *Hawk Volume 3 #1*, Hawk begins his reign as king of Greenhaven. His first self-appointed task is to rid the kingdom of the evil mgical cults.

In *Efflore #1*, a related title, Purebreeze and Falcon take the long trek to the Sea of Stones to investigate reports of alien creatures.

Rip Off: Rip Off is continuing to plan a mixture of mainstream, alternative, and smut titles for 1992. *Lord of Blood* is a vampiric tale by R.A. Jones and Vince Argondezzi. There will also be a new issue of *Fat Freddy's Cat* in June, and *Freak Brothers* #12 later this year. The characters in the August issue of *Those Annoying Post Bros.* will visit the San Diego Comic-Con.

3-D Zone: It's a zany mix of humor and horror in *Dr. Frankenstein's House of 3-D*, featuring Dick Briefer's 1945 origin story and new art by XNO.

Popeye the Zombieman?

The finest practitioners of "ugly art" present *Brain-Bat 3-D*, a gallery of "brain-bats" by Roy Tompkins R.K. Sloan, Dennis Worden, and others.

Viz: Viz has decided to change its format from 40-page color squarebound comics to 32-page stitchbound black & white pages. The format change will bring the price of Viz books down from $4.95 to $2.50-2.75.

The format change is being implemented for several reasons: Viz is transferring its printing operation from the Japan to the U.S., the new format will make the books cheaper and faster to produce, and many fans have said they'd rather see their favorite manga in a cheaper, black & white format.

Striker is scheduled to switch to the new format in April. It will be followed in June by *Crying Freeman Part IV*, which will expand to an eight-part series. *Sanctuary* will become a stitchbound black & white in June, but will retain its 72-80 pages per issue.

Viz's summer titles, *Macross*, *Silent Mobius Part III*, and the tentavely titled *Rusty Angel* will be in the new format. Only *Ranma ½* will continue to be printed in Japan under the old format. Viz graphic novels will also continue to be printed in Japan. ●

DISTRACTIONS!

AARDVARK—VANAHEIM

☐ **CEREBUS #158.**

☐ **CEREBUS #152.** Second printing. By **Dave Sim and Gerhard.** [*B&W comic; $2.25*]

AC COMICS

☐ **ROY ROGERS AND THE FOURTH OF JULY BANDITS.** The ultimate Roy Rogers team-up book. By **Gorby & Nadeau.** [*Color/B&W comic; $5.00*]

☐ **ROY ROGERS WESTERN CLASSICS #4.** Second printing, some editorial material will change. By **Buscema/Manning.** [*Color/B&W comic; $3.95*]

ACID RAIN STUDIOS

☐ **AUTUMN . . . EARTH #1.** Wild stories and bizarre fantasy from the creator of Tundra's *Screaming Meaks Sketchbook*. By **Rick McCollum.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

ANTARCTIC PRESS

☐ **GIRLS OF NINJA HIGH SCHOOL 1992.** It's an anthology series. By **Dunn, Sutton, DeJesus, Hernandez, et al.** [*B&W comic; $3.75*]

ARCHIE

☐ **ARCHIE & FRIENDS #1.** A new quarterly series. By **George Gladir & Stan Goldberg.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

☐ **MIGHTY MUTANIMALS #3.** "The Eyes of the Jaguar." By **Dean Clarrain & Garret Ho.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

☐ **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES #35.** The Turtles, Splinter, and Ninjara journey to Mecca and encouter the hawk mutant Alfalqa. By **Dean Clarrain and Chris Allan.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

ARIA PRESS

☐ **A DISTANT SOIL #4.** "Seasons of Spring" continues as the Scott family experiences a tragic anniversary. By **Colleen Doran.** [*B&W comic; $1.75*]

☐ **A DISTANT SOIL #1.** Second Printing.

BLACK DIAMOND EFFECT

☐ **BLACK DIAMOND EFFECT PROTOTYPE #1.** The book that started it all. By **George Peter Gatsis.** [*B&W comic; $3.10*]

BURCHAM STUDIOS

☐ **SPACE SIRENS #1.** By **Butch Burcham.** Daring beauties battle space creatures in the EC tradition. [*B&W comic; $2.95; Signed and Numbered; $3.95*]

CALIBER PRESS

☐ **KISS ON THE LIPS.** A pin-up book devoted to Marilyn Monroe. By **R.G. Taylor.** [*B&W comic; $3.50*]

☐ **SCARY BOOK #1.** Hell is in an uproar and Lucifer sends the beautiful Crimson to sort it out on Earth. By **Williams, Willhite, & Schaefer.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

☐ **VISIONS: VINCE LOCKE.** A new series that will offer artists a chance to experiment and showcase artwork from various sources. By **Vince Locke.** [*B&W comic; $4.95; 96 pages*]

GAUNTLET COMICS

☐ **COMPLETE REACTOMAN.** A one-shot collecting the original series from B-Movie Comics, including the never-published fourth issue. By **Ken Holewzcynski.** [*B&W comic; $4.95; 72 pages*]

☐ **SAMURAI SEVEN #1.** Seven youths are trained as samurai by an ancient Japanese master to combat a great evil. By **Patrick Zircher.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

☐ **SERPENT RISING #1.** Based on a play first performed in Minnesota. By **Fogel & Van Breisen.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

☐ **TEKQ #1 (of 4).** Tekq, a dead scientist whose psyche has merged with a black hole, has the power to end the rebellion of the Asian Republics. But will he? By **Carpenter & Bradford.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

ICONOGRAFIX

☐ **ANGRYMAN #1.** Ned's appliances are revolting. No, really. By **Eric Haven.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

☐ **HUMAN HEAD COMIX #1.** A bimonthly anthology of unusual horror. By **Brian Sendelbach.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

Angryman **#1: One of those new "lots of black ink" comics.**

CALIBER/TOME PRESS

☐ **CIVIL WAR: MEMORIES AND MEMOIRS**. The American Civil War told through the eyes of the men who fought it. *[B&W comic; $2.95]*

☐ **DISPARATES**. Francisco Goya's last main print series. By **Goya**. *[B&W comic; $2.95]*

☐ **ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE OTHER SIDE**. An illustrated novel, created in 1908, that deals with an artist entering a strange and bizarre kingdom known as Dreamland. By **Alfred Kubin**. *[B&W comic; $2.95]*

☐ **MADMAN WHO SOLD WISDOM**. A selection of the world-famous fables from La Fontaine. By **Gustave Dore**. *[B&W comic; $2.95]*

☐ **THREE VOICES**. A philosophical and nonsensical poem from Lewis Carroll. By **A.B. Frost**. *[B&W comic; $2.95]*

CAT-HEAD COMICS

☐ **BUMMER #1**. All new work by our feature interview in "A Few Words." By **J.R. Williams**. *[B&W comic; $2.95]*

COMIC ZONE

☐ **PSYCHO KILLER'S BODY COUNT #1**. True life mass murderers. Gee, I wonder if they're trying to sponge off Eclipse's press. By **Various**. *[B&W comic; $2.95]*

☐ **ROBOCOP VERSUS TERMINATOR #1**. The Mission: to kill Alex Murphy—Robocop! But who comes to his rescue . . .Skynet with a trio of Terminators. By *comic; $2.95]*

COMICO

☐ **COMICO ILLUSTRATED #1**. A new anthology series. By **Anderson & Geldhof**. *[B&W comic, $1.95]*

☐ **ELEMENTALS OBLIVION WAR SPECIAL #1**. Two versions: a glow-in-the-dark cover and a foil embossed glow-in-the-dark cover. Doesn't matter; the book is overpriced anyway. Cover by Walt Simonson. By **Herman, Leeke & Butler**. *[Color comic; $2.95; Foil Embossed; $4.95]*

☐ **JAGUAR STORIES #1**. Did UCLA film student Kyle Roe commit murder or was he framed? He has to find out before the LAPD catch him. By **Seagle & Allred**. *[B&W comic, $1.95]*

CONTINUITY

☐ **TITAN: GRAPHIC NOVEL**. It's Titan, the Ultimate warrior, versus a race of alien dinosaurs who want our planet. Yowza! By **Stone, Hoover, & Bennett**. *[Color comic; $3.95]*

DARK HORSE COMICS

☐ **ALIENS: HIVE #4 (of 4)**.

☐ **ALIENS: NEWT'S TALE #1 (of 2)**. Adapted from writer/director James Cameron's original screenplay. By **Richardson, Somerville, & Garvey**. *[Color comic; $4.95]*

☐ **ANIMAL CONFIDENTIAL**. A variety of decidedly twisted but not-so-funny animal tales. With a cover by Art Adams. By **Various**. *[B&W comic; $2.25]*

☐ **CHEVAL NOIR #30**.

☐ **DARK HORSE PRESENTS #62**.

☐ **DEADLINE USA #2**.

☐ **THE EYEBALL KID #2 (of 3)**. By **Campbell & Ed Hillyer**. *[B&W comic; $2.25]*

☐ **HARD LOOKS #2**.

☐ **MARSHAL LAW: SUPER BABYLON #1**. The Ultimate Hero Hunter is Back! When we last left our hero he had just commited suicide! Is this the end?!! Will I run out of exclamation marks! Obviously not!!!!!!!! By **Mills & O'Neill**. *[A Blood Soaked Hero Pulping Color comic; $4.95]*

☐ **NEXT MEN #4**. The mutates are reunited and discover that they are not the only survivors of Project Next Man. There are also some mistakes, genetic mistakes. By **John Byrne**. *[Color comic; $2.50]*

☐ **ROBOCOP VERSUS TERMINATOR #1**. The Mission: to kill Alex Murphy—Robocop! But who comes to his rescue . . .Kynet with a trio of Terminators. By **Frank Miller and Walt Simonson**. *[Color comic; $2.50]*

☐ **TERMINATOR: HUNTERS & KILLERS #3 (of 3)**.

☐ **VENUS WARS #14**.

☐ **YOUNG INDIANA JONES CHRONICLES #4**.

DARK TOWER ENTERPRISES

☐ **FREEDOM UNION #1**. Too complicated and stupid to describe. By **Perham & Carant**. *[Color comic; $2.95]*

☐ **SAMARITAN #1**. A Young woman has been given a ring of power with an old tradition for good—as well as a curse.By **Robinson, Procter & J. Moy**. *[Color comic; $2.95]*

DC

☐ **ACTION COMICS #678**. "We Saved Luthor's brain." The secrets of Lex Luthor II revealed. By **Stern, Guice, & Rodier**. *[ships 5/7]*

☐ **ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #492**. "Pursuit of Liberty" Part 2 of 2. By **Ordway, Grummett and Hazlewood**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/26]*

☐ **ALL STAR ARCHIVES Volume #1**. By **Various**. *[Color hardcover; $49.95; ships 5/5]*

☐ **ANIMAL MAN #49**. By **T. Veitch and Dillon**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/26]*

☐ **AQUAMAN #8**. Guest-starring Batman. By **McLaughlin, Hooper, and Dvorak**. *[Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21]*

☐ **ARION, THE IMMORTAL #1**. Arion, Lord of Atlantis and Father of Power Girl, is alive and well after 5,000 years. But now he is a crotchety old man with nowhere to go. That was until Atlantis' magic returned. By **Kupperberg, Wilson, & Acerno**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/26]*

☐ **ARMAGEDDON: INFERNO #4**. Featuring the return of the JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA! By **Ostrander & Various**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/26]*

☐ **BATMAN #480**. "To the Father I Never Knew" Tim Drake must choose between his father and Batman. By **A. Grant & Aparo**. *[Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7]*

☐ **BATMAN #481** "Messenger of Zeus" Part 1 of 2. By **Doug Moench & Jim Aparo**. *[Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21]*

☐ **BATMAN COLLECTION #1**. By **Various**. *[Color set; $37.75; ships 5/21]*

☐ **BATMAN: LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT #33**. "Blades" Part 2 of 3. By **Robinson & Sale**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14]*

☐ **BATMAN: LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT #34**. "Blades" Part 3 of 3. By **Robinson & Sale**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28]*

☐ **BATMAN: RUN RIDDLER RUN #1 (of 3)**. The Riddler is developping a crime-free Gotham. There is just one problem that has to be fixed. . .Batman! By **Jones & Badger**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/26]*

☐ **BATMAN: SHADOW OF THE BAT #1**. "The Last Arkham" part 1. Presenting a new title in the spirit of *LDK*. By **Grant & Breyfogle**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/28]*

☐ **BATMAN: SHADOW OF THE BAT COLLECTOR'S SET**. The comic plus lots of goodies. By **Grant & Breyfogle**. *[Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/26]*

☐ **BLACK CONDOR #2**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/26]*

☐ **BLACK HOOD #7**. *[ships 5/14]*

☐ **THE BLACK HOOD ANNUAL #1**. The conclusion to "Earthquest" with back-up stories of The Web and Shield. Included: a bound-in trading card of an 18-card set. By **Wheatley & Duranona**. *[Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/7]*

☐ **THE COMET #12**. By **Wald, West, & Albrecht**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/7]*

☐ **COOL WORLD #3 (of 4)**. By **Eury, DeStefano, Fiela, & Wray**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/7]*

☐ **THE CRUSADERS #2**. The Fly, Jaguar, Fireball, the Comet, and the Web. They are—**The Crusaders**. Watch as they battle Kalathar in Times Square. By **Augustyn, Wald, R.A. Morales, & Hanna** and **Morales & Hanna**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/4]*

☐ **DEATHSTROKE THE TERMINATOR #12**. Continuing the crossover from *Superman* #68. By **Wolfman, Erwin, & Blyberg**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14]*

☐ **THE DEMON #25**. By **Grant, Semeiks, and B. Smith**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/21]*

☐ **DETECTIVE COMICS #645**. "Electric City" Part 2 of 3. By **Dixon, Lyle, and Hanna**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/4]*

☐ **DOCTOR FATE #41. Final issue!** To aid Shat-Ru, Doctor Fate learns the deep secret of the Lords of Chaos and Order. By **Messner-Loebs & Gross**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/7]*

☐ **DOOM PATROL #56**. A member of the Doom Patrol lies dead and Crazy Jane may have gone completely insane. Life as usual! By **Morrison, Case, & Woch**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/7]*

☐ **ECLIPSO: THE DARKNESS WITHIN #1**. It's DC's answer to Thanos. Done in the style of the still lingering *Armageddon 2001*. By **Giffen, Fleming, Sears, Elliott, & Pennington**. *[Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/21]*

☐ **ENEMY ACE: WAR IDYLL**. By **George Pratt**. *[Color limited hardcover; $75.00; ships 5/21]*

☐ **FLASH #66**. Guest-starring Aquaman. By **Waid, Collins, and Marzan Jr.** *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/28]*

☐ **THE FLY #11** *[ships 5/7]*

☐ **THE GREATEST BATMAN STORIES EVER TOLD Volume #2**. By **Various**. *[Color softcover; $16.95; ships 5/28]*

☐ **GREEN ARROW #63**. "The Hunt for Red Dragon" part 1 of 4. By **Grell, Springer, and Marcos**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/7]*

☐ **GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW COLLECTION #1**. Collecting the groundbreaking run of #76-82 by **Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams**. All the relevance you can stomach. *[Color softcover; $12.95; ships 5/7]*

☐ **GREEN LANTERN #26**. "Evil Star Rising" Part 1 of 3. By **G. Jones, Bright, & Tanghal**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/28]*

☐ **GREEN LANTERN: MOSAIC #2**. Ch'p wants to know why he wasn't included in the new Green Lantern Corps. So he grabs Salaak and heads for Oa. By **G. Jones, Hamner, and Panosian**. *[Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/14]*

☐ **GUY GARDNER: REBORN #1 (of 3)**. Guy has lost his power ring so he quits the Justice League and goes off on his own to see if he still has what it takes to be a hero. By **Jones, Staton, & Rubinstein**. *[Color comic; $4.95; ships 5/14]*

☐ **HAWKWORLD #24**. "Escape from Thanagar" Part 4 of 5. By **Ostrander and Nolan**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/14]*.

☐ **HELLBLAZER #54**. "Royal Blood" Part 4 of 4. By **Ennis and Simpson**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/21]*

☐ **JAGUAR #11**. *[ships 5/21]*

☐ **JUSTICE LEAGUE AMERICA #64**. By **Jurgens, and Burchett**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/14]*

☐ **JUSTICE LEAGUE EUROPE #39**. *[ships 5/28]*

☐ **THE LEGEND OF THE SHIELD #12**. By **Miehm and Weld**. *[Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28]*

☐ **L.E.G.I.O.N. '92 #41**. By **Kitson & R. Smith**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/14]*

☐ **L.E.G.I.O.N. '92 #42**. By **Kitson & Smith**. *[Color comic; $1.50, ships 5/28]*

☐ **LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #31**. "The Terra Mosaic" continues By **Giffen, T&M Bierbaum, Pearson, and Story** *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/21]*

☐ **LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES ANNUAL #3**. The continuation of "The Quiet Darkness" as Brin Londo undergoes yet another change which leads into his own mini-series latter this summer. By **Gordon, T.& M. Bierbaum, & Phillips**. *[Color comic; $3.50; ships 5/14]*

☐ **LOBO'S BACK #3**. Lobo is killed once again and this time he is reincarnated as a squirrel. By **Giffen, Grant, and Bisley**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/28]*

☐ **MS. TREE SPECIAL #9**. Ms. Tree's baby is kidnapped and she'll stop at nothing to get back her child. By **Collins & Beatty**. *[Color comic; $3.95; 64 pages; ships 5/28]*

☐ **NEW TITANS #88**. Prologue to a new *Titans* title debuting next month. Plus another Titan is revealed to be a traitor. By **Wolfman, Grummett, and Vey**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/21]*

☐ **THE RAY #6 (of 6)**. By **Harris, Quesada, and Nichols**. *[Color comic; $1.00; ships 5/28]*

☐ **SANDMAN #39**. "Convergence" continues with a tale of Marco Polo and Kubla Kahn. By **Gaiman & Watkiss**. *[Color comic; $1.50; ships 5/21]*

☐ **SHADE, THE CHANGING MAN #25**. "The Road" Part 5 of 5. By **Milligan, Bachalo, & Pennington**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14]*

☐ **STAR TREK #33**. "Veritas" part 4 of 4. By **Weinstein, Purcell, and Starr**. *[Color comic, $1.75; ships 5/14]*

☐ **STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION #33**. By **Friedman, Penders, & Marcos**. *[Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28]*

☐ **SUICIDE SQUAD #66. Final issue!** In the dramatic conclusion to this series, Amanda Waller and the rest of the Squad face a villain who may be as powerful and cold-hearted as death itself. Neither Amanda nor the squad will ever be the same. (I will miss this series.) *[ships 5/7]*

☐ **SUPERBOY SPECIAL #1**. Wrapping up the continuity of the cancelled series. By **Berkowitz, Swan, & Sinnott**. *[Color*

***Superman Annual* #1: The Man of Steel's greatest power—foreshortening!**

comic; $1.75; 48 pages; ships 5/7]

☐ **SUPERMAN #69.** "The Pursuit of Liberty" Part 1 of 2. By **Jurgens and Breeding.** [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21*]

☐ **SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL #13.** [*ships 5/14*]

☐ **SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL ANNUAL #1.** Starring "The Darkness Within," the giant Annuals crossover with Eclipso. [*Color comic; $; ships*]

☐ **SWAMP THING #121.** The return of the Sunderland Corporation. By **Collins, Eaton, and DeMulder.** [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28*]

☐ **WARLORD #6 (of 6).** [*ships 5/7*]

☐ **THE WEB #10.** [*ships 5/14*]

☐ **WONDER WOMAN #64.** By **Messner-Loebs & J. Thompson, and Tanghal.** [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14*]

PIRANHA PRESS

☐ **BEAUTIFUL STORIES FOR UGLY CHILDREN #29.** By **Louapre and Sweetman.** [*B&W comic; $2.50; ships 5/28*]

DEADLINE

☐ **DEADLINE #39.** Featuring "Tank Girl" and "Johnny Nemo." By **Various.** [*Color/B&W magazine; $4.50*]

DIMENSION X

☐ **DIMENSION X #1.** Pulpy science fiction horror anthology. By **Luck & Kraus.** [*B&W comic; $3.50*]

DISNEY

☐ **SEBASTIAN #1 (of 2).** By **David & Murry.** [*Color comic; $1.50*]

DRAWN & QUARTERLY

☐ **PEEPSHOW #2.** See the review of the first issue by Adam-Troy Castro in this issue. By **Joe Matt.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

☐ **YUMMY FUR #28.** By **Chester Brown.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

DYNAMIC PUBLISHING

☐ **TEAM LANCER #1.** A complicated time travel super-hero story. [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

☐ **TIMEJUMPER #1.** Another time travel story. [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

☐ **WARRIORS OF THE LION #1.** A stupid rehash of the Legend of King Arthur in 2019. [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

ECLIPSE

☐ **AZTEC ACE #1.** It's the return of the time travelling adventurer Aztec Ace. Nine-Croc means to destroy all humanity at the source. His target—EVE! By **Moench, Helnlein, & Mounts.** [*Color comic; $2.50*]

☐ **LOCO VS. PULVERINE #1.** It's a parody featuring "The Fight of the Century" By **Donnelly & Yap.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

☐ **MIRACLEMAN #24.** "When Titans Clash" with covers by Barry Winsor-Smith. By **Gaiman and Buckingham.** [*Color comic; $2.50*]

☐ **TECUMSEH.** The story is based on the play by Alan J. Eckert. It tells the life of the great Shawnee leader. The story is endorsed by the Shawnee Nation as an accurate representation of Shawnee life, culture, traditions, and costuming. By **Tim Truman.** [*Color softcover $8.95; Hardcover $24.95; Signed & Numbered $50; 64 pages*]

FANTACO

☐ **NIGHT'S CHILDREN: DOUBLE INDEMNITY #1.** By **Wendy Snow-Lang.** [*B&W comic; $7.95*]

FANTAGRAPHICS

☐ **ADVENTURES ON THE FRINGE #3.** Crabb and the Mitchells descend on Aspen, Colorado, to attend the drugs and molestation trial of Hunter S. Thompson. By **R.L. Crabb.** [*B&W comic; $2.25*]

☐ **AVENUE D #1.** A one-shot collecting all of *Snake Eyes* editor **Glen Head's** best from the 1980s. [*B&W comic; $3.50; 52 pages*]

☐ **HAR HAR COMICS #2.** It's cover-to-cover comical comics, featuring two longish Hyper Al stories: "Hyper Al Goes Latin" and "Hyper Al's Big Day." By **Mike Kazaleh.** [*B&W comic; $2.25*]

☐ **HATE #9.** The conclusion to "Follow That Dream" is hilariously funny and terrifyingly real. By **Peter Bagge.** [*B&W comic; $2.25*]

☐ **LIBRARIAN #1.** Penny, a library receptionist, is hopelessly, helplessly in love with her boss, John K. Her infatuation becomes obsession when she discovers he's a slumlord. What is the frequency, Kenneth? By **Penny Van Horn.** [*B&W comic; $2.75*]

☐ **LOVE AND ROCKETS #31.** Second printing. By **Hernandez Bros.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

Avenue D: More stories in the ongoing "origin" of Glenn Head.

☐ **PERRAMUS #4 (4).** Perramus and his friends plumb the lower depths in their desperate attempt to save the soul of the city of Santa Maria. By **Breccia & Sasturain.** [*B&W comic; $3.50*]

☐ **USAGI YOJIMBO #35.** This issue we're introduced via flashback to Gen's father, the famous General Murakami. By **Stan Sakai.** [*B&W comic; $2.25*]

☐ **USAGI YOJIMBO BOOK V.** The latest collection of *Usagi*, including "How I Draw *Usagi Yojimbo*" from *Amazing Heroes*, which will not be reprinted in the softcover. Introduction by Stan "The Man" Lee. By **Stan Sakai.** [*Color Hardcover; $39.95*]

MONSTER COMICS

☐ **CALIGARI 2050 #1 (of 3).** Ten years after the development of a massive experimental computer, one of the project's investors is murdered by a mysterious, shadowy figure. By **Nieves & Holewczynski.** [*B&W comic; $2.25*]

☐ **COFFIN BLOOD #1.** A horror anthology. Stories include "Brimstone and Hellfire" by **Dave Stevenson** and "Place of Monsters" by **Paul Brown.** Mike Hoffman does a real twisted cover. Not for the meek! By **Various.** [*B&W comic; $3.95*]

☐ **DARE #3 (of 4).** Dan Dare and his former batman, Digby, discover the terrible secret behind the death of Jocelyn Peabody. By **Morrison & Hughes.** [*Color comic; $3.95*]

FELIX COMICS

☐ **ADVENTURES OF THE BLUE ARROW #1.** [*Color comic; $2.25*]

FRIENDLY/PERSONALITY

CELEBRITY COMICS

☐ **BEATLES VS. ROLLING STONES #1.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

☐ **GUNS 'N ROSES #1.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

☐ **SEXY WOMEN #1.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

HUMOR

☐ **GUN FURY #1.** By **Blair & Cooper.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

PERSONALITY COMICS

☐ **FOOTBALL HEROES: JOE NAMATH #1.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

☐ **PINK FLOYD #1.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

GAY COMICS

☐ **GAY COMICS #15.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

HARVEY COMICS

☐ **ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS MAGAZINE #1.** [*Color comic; $1.50*]

☐ **BEETLE BAILEY #1.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

☐ **BEETLEJUICE #1.** [*Color comic; $1.50*]

☐ **FLINTSTONES #1.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

☐ **HANNA BARBERA COMICS & STORIES #1.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

☐ **JETSONS #1.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

☐ **LITTLE DOT #1.** So you thought you knew "cute" Little Dot? Just wait 'til you see the terrifying cause of her obsession in "D.O.T./D.O.A." by **Grant Morrison & Simon Bisley.** (Actually, it's just a bunch of reprints.) [*Color comic; $1.25*]

***Spirit: Origin Years* #1: Believe it or not, his mask was actually smaller then.**

☐ **MONSTER IN MY POCKET ANNUAL #1.** [*Color comic; $9.95*]

☐ **SCOOBY DOO #1.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

☐ **YOGI BEAR #1.** [*Color comic; $1.25*]

HERO GRAPHICS

☐ **ICICLE #1 (of 4).** Icicle goes out on her first date with Jimmy Dugan. By **Mallonee, Barras, & Marriman.** [*Color comic; $4.50*]

☐ **LADY ARCANE #1 (of 5).** "Bats!" By **Mallonee, Wales, Stowers, & Marrinan.** [*Color comic; $4.50*]

INNOVATION

☐ **DARK SHADOWS #2.**

☐ **LIGHT FANTASTIC #1.** The continuation of Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* saga. By **Rockwell & Ross.** [*Color comic; $2.50*]

☐ **NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET: THE BEGINNING #2.**

☐ **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA #1.** By **Perkins & Daughton.** [*Color comic; 68 pages; $6.95*]

☐ **QUANTUM LEAP #7.**

☐ **QUEEN OF THE DAMNED #7.**

KITCHEN SINK PRESS

☐ **SPIRIT: ORIGIN YEARS #1.** The pre-WWII Spirit stories in chronological order. By **Will Eisner.** [*B&W comic; $2.95*]

MALIBU

ADVENTURE

☐ **STRANGE SPORTS STORIES #1.** The Wide World of Sports meets the Twilight Zone. By **Marshall, Byrd, & McCorkindale.** [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

ETERNITY

☐ **NINJA HIGH SCHOOL #34.**

☐ **ROBOTECH II: THE SENTINELS SWIMSUIT SPECTACULAR #1.** A blatant rip-off of the *Amazing Heroes Swimsuit Special*, which was itself a rip-off of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, but that's beside the point. By **Weltrip Bros.** [*Color comic; $2.95*]

☐ **ROBOTECH: INVID WAR #1**. Jon Wolff must ready the Earth for the Invid Invasion but it's is too busy fighting itself. By **Spangler & Eldred**. [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

IMAGE

☐ **SPAWN #1**. It's Image day 2. Overhyped mediocrity brought to you by Malibu. By **Todd McFarlane**. [*Color comic: $1.95*]

☐ **TARZAN THE WARRIOR #3**.

MARVEL

☐ **ALPHA FLIGHT #110**. An *Infinity War* Crossover. Part 1 of 3. By **Furman, Broderick, & Patterson**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14*]

☐ **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #364**. By **Michelinie, Bagley, and Emberlin**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/14*]

☐ **AVENGERS #349**. [*ships 5/21*]

☐ **AVENGERS WEST COAST #84**. Guest-starring Spider-Man. By **R. Thomas, Ross, & Dizon**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **BARBIE #19**. [*ships 5/14*]

☐ **BARBIE TRADE PAPERBACK**. Collecting some of the most popular stories from the first year of *Barbie* and *Barbie Fashion*. By **Slate & Trusian**. [*Color comic; $8.95*]

☐ **BARBIE FASHION #19**. [*ships 5/28*]

☐ **BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT COMIC BOOK #8**. [*ships 5/14*]

Hell's Angel #1

☐ **CAGE #4**. Guest-starring the Punisher. By **McLaurin, Turner, and Ivy**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **CAPTAIN AMERICA #402**. "The Man and the Wolf," Part 1 of 6. By **Gruenwald, Levins and Sutanadi**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **CAPTAIN AMERICA #403**. "The Man and the Wolf," Part 2 of 6. By **Gruenwald, Levins, & Sutanadi**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21*]

☐ **CAPTAIN PLANET #10 (of 12)**. [*ships 5/28*]

☐ **CONAN THE BARBARIAN #258**. "The Second Coming of Shuma-Gorath." [*ships 5/21*]

☐ **CONAN SAGA #64**. [*ships 5/28*]

☐ **COPS: THE JOB #2 (of 4)**. By **Hama, Jusko, Harris and Palmiotti**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **DAREDEVIL #306**. Guest-starring Spider-Man. By **Chichester, Weeks, and Williamson**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **DAREDEVIL ANNUAL #6**. "The System Bytes," Part 2 of 4. By **Wright, Wyman, & Ivy**. [*Color comic; $2.25*]

☐ **DARKHAWK #17**. [*ships 5/7*]

☐ **DARKHAWK ANNUAL #1**. "Assault on Armor City," part 1 of 3. By **Fingeroth & Manley**. [*Color comic; $2.25*]

☐ **DEATHLOK #13**. "Biohazard Agenda," part 2 of 4. Guest-starring Nick Fury, with new secrets of Deathlok's origin. [*ships 5/28*]

☐ **DEFENDERS OF DYNATRON CITY #6 (of 6)**. [*ships 5/28*]

☐ **DOCTOR STRANGE #43**. *Infinity War* crossover. By **Thomas & Isherwood**. [*ships 5/28*]

☐ **DR. STRANGE ANNUAL #2**. "Return of the Defenders," Part 2 of 4. By **Thomas, Hoover, Lopez, & Wyman**. [*Color comic; $2.25; ships 5/21*]

☐ **DOCTOR WHO MAGAZINE #185**.

☐ **EXCALIBUR #52**. Excalibur loses a teammate. By **Alan Davis, Braithwaite, & Rubinstein**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28*]

☐ **EXCALIBUR SPECIAL: XX CROSSING**. The original X-Men and Professor X find themselves trapped in the future (our present). In order to save the world, Excalibur must send them home. By **Lobdell**. [*Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/14*]

☐ **FANTASTIC FOUR #366**. *Infinity War* crossover. By **DeFalco, Ryan, Sutanadi**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28*]

☐ **GHOST RIDER #27**. Guest-starring the X-Men. Ghost Rider vs. the Brood. By **Mackie, Wagner & Witherby**. [*Color comic; $2.75; 52 pages; ships 5/14*]

☐ **GHOST RIDER POSTER BOOK**. By **Various**. [*Color comic; $4.95*]

☐ **G.I. JOE #126**. [*ships 5/21*]

☐ **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #26**. The secret origin of the Guardians of the Galaxy. By **Valentino & Montano**. [*Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/14*]

☐ **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY ANNUAL #2**. "The System Bytes," Part 4 of 4. By **Valentino & Montano**. [*Color comic; $2.25*]

☐ **HELL'S ANGEL #1**. New from Marvel UK By **Jaye & Senior**. [*Color comic; $1.75*]

☐ **INCREDIBLE HULK #395**. Guest-starring the Punisher. By **David, Wildman, & Farmer**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21*]

☐ **INFINITY WAR #2**. The Infinity War explodes on Earth as Reed Richards discovers that someone is replacing super-heroes with evil duplicates. But with Wolverine and the Punisher who could tell the difference? By **Starlin, Lim, and Milgrom**. [*Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/28*]

☐ **IRON MAN #282**. By **Kaminski, Hopgood, & Wiacek**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28*]

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☐ **MARVEL AGE #114**. [*ships 5/21*]

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☐ **MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #10**. Namor, The Fantastic Four, Thor, and a Ms. Marvel story by **Chris Claremont** with Sabretooth as the villain. [*Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/14*]

☐ **MARVEL TALES #263**. [*ships 5/21*]

☐ **MARVEL UNIVERSE MASTER EDITION #20**. [*ships 5/28*]

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☐ **MOTORMOUTH #2**. Guest-starring Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. By **Marks, Frank, and Lanning**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28*]

☐ **THE 'NAM #70**. By **Dixon, Kobasic, and Palmiotti**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28*]

☐ **NAMOR THE SUB-MARINER #28**. [*ships 5/7*]

☐ **NEW WARRIORS #24**. "Nothing but the Truth," 4 of 4. A double-sized finale featuring a die-cut cover. By **Nicieza, Bagley, and Mahlstedt**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28*]

☐ **NFL SUPERPRO #10**. [*ships 5/7*]

☐ **NOMAD #3**. USAgent is sent by the commission to bring Nomad in. Good luck. By **Nicieza, Hawbaker, & McKenna**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/7*]

☐ **ORIGINAL GHOST RIDER #1**. Reprinting the first run of Ghost Rider starting with *Marvel Spotlight #5*. With a new cover by Mark Texeira. By **Friedrich & Ploog**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/7*]

☐ **PENDRAGON II #1**. Another new series from the UK's Genesis '92. By **Tomlinson, Abnett, Gascoine, & Buylla**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14*]

☐ **THE PIRATES OF DARK WATER #9 (of 9)**. [*ships 5/28*]

☐ **PUNISHER #66**. "Eurohit" Part 3 of 7. By **Abnett, Lanning, Braithwaite, and Williamson**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21*]

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☐ **PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL #44**. [*ships 5/7*]

☐ **PUNISHER WAR ZONE #4**. "Ladder of Death" Rung 5 of 6. By **Dixon, JR.Jr, and Janson**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14*]

☐ **QUASAR #36**. "Operation Galactic Storm" Aftermath. The intergalactic war is over, but Seddam is still in power. By **Gruenwald, Capullo, and Candelario**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/14*]

☐ **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #199**. [*ships 5/14*]

☐ **SHE-HULK #41**. "The She-Hulk Space Saga" Part 2. [*ships 5/7*]

☐ **S.H.I.E.L.D. #36**. "The Cold War of Nick Fury" Part 2 of 4. By **Brown, Sharp, Wyman, and Hudson**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/21*]

☐ **SILVER SABLE #2**. By **Wright, Sutter, & Panosian**. [*Color comic; $2.00; 32 pages; ships 5/14*]

☐ **SILVER SURFER #67**. It's an "Infinity War" crossover and it's bi-weekly. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/14*]

☐ **SILVER SURFER #68**. Ditto. By **Marz, West, & Christopher**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28*]

☐ **SLEEPWALKER #14**. [*ships 5/14*]

☐ **SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #190**. By **DeMatteis & Buscema**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28*]

☐ **SPIDER-MAN #24**. "Infinity War" crossover. By **Howard Mackie & ?** [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/21*]

☐ **SPIDER-MAN: ASSASSINATION PLOT Trade Paperback**. By **Michelinie, McFarlane, Gordon, & Larsen**. [*Color comic; $14.95; ships 5/7*]

☐ **TERROR INC. #1**. Boldly ripping off . . . I'm sorry, I meant lifting heavily from the failed Epic "Shadowline Saga" comes Schrek . . . I mean Terror. . . a supernatural assasain who resembles and has the exact same powers as the villain Schrek. By **Chichester & Zaffino**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/7*]

☐ **THE THING #4 (of 4)**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/14*]

☐ **THOR #448**. Odin finally awakes. By **DeFalco, Frenz, and Milgrom**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28*]

☐ **TOXIC CRUSADERS #3**. By **Steve Gerber & Yaniger**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **WARHEADS #1**. From Marvel UK. Guest-starring Nick Fury. By **Vince & Erskine**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28*]

☐ **WARLOCK #3 (of 6)**. Reprints the original series by **Jim Starlin**. [*Color comic; $2.50; ships 5/7*]

☐ **WARLOCK AND THE INFINITY WATCH #6**. Classic Warlock villain the Man-Beast is back. By **Starlin & Medina**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/21*]

☐ **WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #89**. A special commemorative 30th Anniversary edition—a double-sized issue with a 3-page gatefold poster and a hologram cover. By **Mackie, Saviuk, and DeLa-Rosa**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **WHAT IF? #36**. "Time Quake" 5 of 5. "What if The Watcher had to Save the Universe?" By **Thomas, Lofficier,and Rogers**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21*]

☐ **WHAT THE?! #19**. Now monthly. By **Various**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28*]

☐ **WOLVERINE #56**. By **Hama, Silvestri, and Green**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/14*]

☐ **WOLVERINE #57**. Lady Mariko dies. By **Hama, Silvestri, & Green**. [*Color comic; $1.75; ships 5/28*]

☐ **WOLVERINE: SAVE THE TIGER**. Reprinting Wolverine's first serial from *Marvel Comics Presents*. By **Claremont, Buscema, & Janson**. [*Color comic; $2.95; ships 5/7*]

The cast and cool car of *Doc Savage: The Manual of Bronze.*

☐ **WONDER MAN #11**. By **Jones, Johnson, and Pencolan**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/14*]

☐ **WONDER MAN ANNUAL #1**. "The System Bytes" Part 3 of 4. By **Jones, Robertson, & Harps**. [*Color comic; $2.25; ships 5/14*]

☐ **WORLD CHAMIONSHIP WRESTLING #4**. [*ships 5/7*]

☐ **X-FACTOR #80**. [*ships 5/21*]

☐ **X-FORCE #12**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/28*]

☐ **UNCANNY X-MEN #290**. Forge asks for Storm's hand in marriage. John Byrne quit because they weren't giving him enough time to write the stories. So now they have Scott Lobdell?! Give me a break. By **Lobdell & Portacio**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/7*]

☐ **X-MEN #10**. By **Lobdell, Lee, and Williams**. [*Color comic; $1.25; ships 5/21*]

☐ **X-MEN CLASSIC #73**. By **Claremont, P. Smith & Wiacek**. [*ships 5/28*]

EPIC

☐ **AKIRA #35**. Boy, are these guys late. By **Katsuhiro Otomo**. [*ships 5/14*]

☐ **AKIRA TRADE PAPERBACK #5**. At this rate, they're going to catch up with the regular series. By **Katsuhiro Otomo**. [*Color softcover; $14.95; ships 5/14*]

☐ **EPIC #2 (of 4)**. A new anthology using Epic's cast of characters. "Nightbreed," "Stalkers," and "Wild Cards" are featured. Plus a cover by Dave Dorman. By **Various**. [*Color comic; $4.95; ships 5/21*]

☐ **GROO THE WANDERER #91**. [*ships 5/14*]

☐ **HELLRAISER #14**. [*ships 5/21*]

☐ **HELLRAISER III: HELL ON EARTH**. The movie adaptation. By **Atkins & Kim**. [*Color comic; $4.95; Color magazine; $2.95; ships 5/7*]

☐ **IDOL #3 (of 3)**.[*ships 5/21*]

☐ **NIGHTBREED #17**. [*ships 5/21*]

☐ **THE STARS MY DESTINATION**. The long-awaited adaptation of the Alfred Bester novel. By **Alfred Bester & Howard Chaykin**. [*Color comic; $21.95; ships 5/7*]

MILLENIUM PUBLISHING

☐ **DOC SAVAGE: THE MANUAL OF BRONZE #1**. Everything you wanted to know about Doc Savage and a few things you didn't. By **Steelfreeze, Hughes, Truman, Banke & Wildey**. [*Color comic; $2.50*]

☐ **H.P. LOVECRAFT'S CTHULHU: HOUNDS OF TINDALOS #1 (of 2)**. Based on a story by Frank Belknap Long. By **Collins, Heck, & Hutchinson**. [*Color comic; $2.50*]

MIRAGE

☐ **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES #47**. Contains an eight-page preview of *Space Usagi*. By **Michael Dooney, Stan Sakai**. [*B&W comic; $2.00*]

MISTER PLANET

☐ **WITNESS #1**. Their mission: preserve the little that's good in the world and reduce the rest to smoldering ash. Look out, Politicians. By **Chieff & Caravaggi**. [*B&W comic; $3.00*]

MU PRESS

☐ **SHANDA THE PANDA #1**. More funny animals. By **Curtis & Sagara**. [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

NICOTAT

☐ **BORIS THE BEAR #36**. By **James Dean Smith**. [*B&W comic; $2.75*]

NIGHT WYND ENTERPRISES

☐ **DRAGONFIRE: CLASSIFIED FILES #1 (of 4)**. By **Barry Blair**. [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

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NOW COMICS

☐ **SPEED RACER PRESTIGE EDITION #1 (of 3).** Speed Racer for the 90's. By **Caputo, Kozlarski, & Stegbauer**. [*Color comic; (three variations); $3.95, $2.50, $1.95*]

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RUSS COCHRAN

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TUNDRA

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☐ **CAGES #5.** By **Dave McKean**. [*Color comic; $3.95*]

☐ **COBALT 60 #3.** By **Bode & Todd**. [*Color comic; $4.95*]

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VALIANT/VOYAGER

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☐ **HARBINGER #8.** "Unity: Chapter 8." By **Shooter, Lapham, & Mayo**. [*Color comic; $2.50*]

☐ **MAGNUS ROBOT FIGHTER #15.** "Unity: Chapter 4." By **Shooter and Colon**.

☐ **RAI #5.** "Unity: Chapter 7." By **Michelinie, St. Pierre, & Barnett**. [*Color comic; $2.25*]

☐ **SHADOWMAN #4.** "Unity: Chapter 6." By **Perozich, Lapham, & Ryder**. [*Color comic; $2.25*]

☐ **SOLAR, MAN OF THE ATOM #11.** "Unity: Chapter 8." By **Shooter, Perlin and Drake**. [*Color comic; $2.25*]

☐ **X-O MANOWAR #6.** "Unity: Chapter 5." [*Color comic; $2.25*]

Lightning bolts—If they worked for Zot and Mage, they'll work for *Madman*.

VIZ COMICS

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VORTEX

☐ **ED THE HAPPY CLOWN: THE DEFINITIVE ED BOOK.** This book contains additional material from the *Yummy Fur* comic that has never been collected. By **Chester Brown**. [*B&W softcover; $12.95*]

☐ **FOOD #1.** A book spotlighting new talent, David Lapp. By **David Lapp**. [*B&W comic; $2.50*]

WARP

☐ **ELFQUEST: THE HIDDEN YEARS #1.** Richard and Wendy spotlight the individual characters of the World of Two Moons and their stories. Wendy does the series in a new painted style. By **Richard and Wendy Pini**. [*Color comic; $2.00*]

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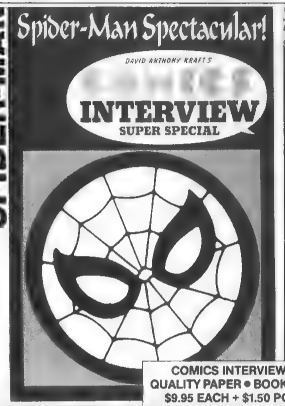

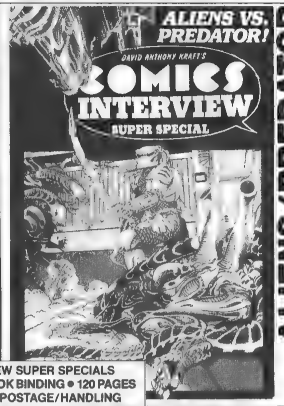

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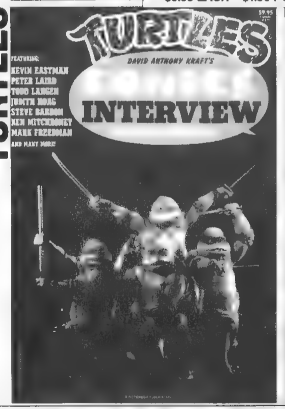

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the DAVE SIM interview

original sim

by jason sacks

The first issue of Cerebus *came out in December, 1977. The artist, writer and publisher of that comic was Dave Sim. The comic was in black & white. All of those facts made it unique then, as did* Cerebus' *storyline—he was a three-foot tall gray aardvark in a medieval land full of humans.*

As I write this it's February, 1992. Cerebus *#154 is sitting on my kitchen table. The book is still pencilled, written and published by Dave Sim, now with the assistance of Gerhard. Compare that record with the record of* Spectacular Spider-Man, *which premiered at around the same time but which has had literally hundreds of creators work on it, though still published by Marvel.*

In those 154 issues, Cerebus *has been a barbarian, kitchen staff supervisor, Prime Minister, ex-Prime Minister, husband, Prime Minister again, Pope and houseguest. Spider-Man, in contrast, is still that crime-fighter with the webs.*

The fifth Cerebus *novel, "Mothers and Daughters," has recently begun. The previous novels, "High Society," "Church and State," "Jaka's Story," and "Melmoth" have explored such weighty topics as politics, organized religion, power, love and death. Your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man still just fights the good fight against evil-doers.*

All of this description makes the book sound serious and weighty. At times it is. I'd put the ending of "Jaka's Story" up against Shakespeare in terms of its tragedy. But the series is also often quite hilarious. I'd put the scenes in "High Society" with Lord Julius (a Groucho Marx character), Duke Leonardi (a Chico Marx character) and Cerebus up against Monty Python or the Marx Brothers in terms of uproariousness.

In a comics world of hologram covers, short-lived hot artists with limited talents, silly crossover stories and tacky attempts at realism, Sim continues to present his complex, fascinating comic every month. He's even announced he'll be doing the book until it ends with issue 300. Eight years ago that sounded like a joke. Now it sounds like fact.

In this interview you'll find Sim as interesting as his work. He's outspoken, controversial at times, and very articulate. He's also damn funny.

This interview was conducted in December 1991 over the phone while Sim was inking parts of issue #154.

AMAZING HEROES: *I guess the first thing to ask you is, what is "Mothers and Daughters" going to be about?*

DAVE SIM: "Mothers and Daughters."

It basically serves the same kind of function to the rest of the storyline that "Church and State" did to "High Society." It's an elaboration in a lot of ways. It's a tying up of loose ends. The first half of all of the novels is sort of a playing out of random elements. Then the second half resolves the whole thing. I kind of create the shoelaces in the first half and then tie them all together in the second half.

So the overall *Cerebus* storyline is like that as well. The first 150 issues is a lot of loose ends. The second half is a lot of tying it up. So "Mothers and Daughters" is far more of a "tying up of loose ends" kind of storyline than any one of the previous ones have been.

AH: *I was surprised to see Terim appear in issue # 151.*

SIM: It shouldn't be surprising. I'm capable of just about anything.

AH: *Can you give me an idea what some of the plot lines or general themes of "Mothers and Daughters" will be?*

SIM: Well, "High Society" broke down into political power, basically. "Church and State" was power and belief; as opposed to an imposed power, it was a power of choice. That's what religion is. Then "Jaka's Story" had the theme of love; "Melmoth" was death. "Mothers and Daughters" is birth and rebirth.

AH: *Birth and rebirth, that's interesting.*

SIM: Well they're awfully good at it. That's why it's "Mothers and Daughters."

AH: *At the climax of "Church and State," Cerebus is told he will die "alone, unloved and unmourned."*

Basically, after he comes back to earth he sits in a fog. Does Cerebus get reborn at the beginning of "Mothers and Daughters?"

SIM: Oh yeah. You can certainly see that in issue #150.

That was a lot of the point of "Melmoth," those parallel deaths going on, and then just before the complete expiration of Cerebus, he snaps out of it. Before that point, he's sort of the dead sitting up. Everyone dies many, many times before they actually physically die.

AH: *It seems like Cerebus has had three or four deaths that immediately pop to mind.*

SIM: Oh, sure. I think anybody can examine their own lives and think "a part of me died here." Parts of us die and are reborn. Parts die and stay dead. As Stephen King so aptly puts it, sometimes dead is better.

I find that most entertainments and most literature tend to consist of wishful thinking that has very little to

"Jaka's Story" interwove Jaka's childhood and youth and her current life with Rick and Cerebus.

do with what existence really is.

Love & Marriage

AH: *One of the most interesting things to me when I was rereading "Jaka's Story" was how realistic the married couple are.*

SIM: Most portrayals of marriage are very one dimensional—like this is the abusive husband and this is the noble, long-suffering wife. Marriage is far more interesting than its portrayal, nine times out of ten. So I basically tried to show that marriage brings out the best in people and the worst in people. That was just one of the elements of "Jaka's Story."

The novel wasn't just about marriage but about love. Love is both a horrible and wonderful thing. It's usually both simultaneously. Everybody in the story is in love with somebody and it doesn't make them happy.

AH: *It's interesting that the relationship between Cerebus and Jaka has evolved so much through the entire series. As the relationship has evolved, their interaction has gotten much more mature.*

SIM: In a way. I'm one of those people who doesn't think that's what happens with love. Maturity tends to mean change, and there's very little change in love if it's working properly.

AH: *An evolution maybe?*

SIM: Evolution would be better. Maturity tends to imply it's getting better. I've found that most of the time love doesn't get better; it's at its best at the beginning and it goes downhill from there.

AH: *You sound like a man who's divorced.*

SIM: I've been divorced, but I've also started relationships. You still feel the same. It's not that you ever go in thinking, "Well, this is going to go bad." We always stay optimistic which is a lot of times very unhealthy because you're not keeping a realistic eye on it. Most people who are married, if you ask them, 99% are happily married. But at the same time half of them get divorced.

AH: *That's one of the nice things about love, the fantasy in your mind of how it makes you feel.*

SIM: I was definitely trying to show in "Jaka's Story" that to consider love an unqualified good thing—"all you need is love"—is really naive, very simplistic, and ultimately destructive.

Pud would consider himself to love Jaka, but obviously that's not very healthy in either of their cases. Oscar would consider that he loves Rick, and that's not especially healthy. Cerebus loves Jaka, and that's not healthy either. I tried to portray the sides of love that I don't see portrayed because it is so often done rhetorically.

Orson Welles said once that a happy ending is dependent on ending a story before it's done. Almost everything ends unhappily, but if you stop the story at a happy point, then you say it was a happy story.

Death

AH: *Ultimately Cerebus will be on his deathbed.*

SIM: Ultimately everybody's on their deathbed.

It's interesting, the reactions people have to Cerebus "dying alone, unmourned and unloved." Everyone dies alone. You could have a room full of people, they could even be lying in bed with you if you want, but you're still going to die alone.

AH: *My image of that line was that Cerebus would die in the street or something, alone with no one around him, holding his hand or anything like that.*

SIM: That's obviously the most natural construction to put to it. It's not necessarily true. A lot of what I was trying to point out with Cerebus in "Melmoth" is that you can be surrounded by people and still be unmourned and unloved.

A lot of us delude ourselves that we are loved, and you have to say to people, "How many people do you still know, and have an interesting relationship with, that you did three years ago?"

AH: *That's happened in the whole series. In the earliest issues Cerebus did have people who seemed to be his friends, but the only person who ever cared for him unreservedly was Jaka.*

SIM: Everyone misinterprets her. Because she's the girlfriend, the one true love sort of thing, everyone goes right to the cliche of ultimately she's absolutely good. People do terrible, monstrous, hateful things for their own reasons. You're always in a relationship with a stranger.

Jaka's Story

AH: *That's why I thought the ending of "Jaka's Story" was so devastating, because you present a side of Rick there that I had never expected to see.*

SIM: I'm a believer that with most people it's just a matter of finding the right buttons to push. I really structured the story in such a way that it looks at the beginning like a cliched love story.

Cerebus becomes a house guest and is staying with them even though he's obviously still in love with Jaka. If you tie that in with the rocky road that Jaka's and Rick's marriage is, the first half of the novel reads like a traditional love story. In fact, a female friend of Gerhard's was reading the first half of the novel and her first comment was, "I just want to know who gets the girl." But that's not the story. I would not bother to work for two years on a story that came down to "who gets the girl."

AH: *That was what made it such a shock when the Cirinists break down Pud's door. I felt like I was set up for a romantic triangle and then that happened. Looking back on the novel, I feel like I could have seen that coming.*

SIM: I prefer works of fiction that have surprises to them. Many people don't like surprises in their fiction. People buy Harlequin romances to read the same story over and over.

I surprised myself with "Jaka's Story." When I conceived the novel, I had it structured around the incarceration, beginning with the Cirinists breaking down the door. I worked backwards from there, thinking I had to get people to care about these characters. I wanted to show them a certain amount of what Jaka is like. I wanted to create a sympathetic husband.

I would not bother to work for two years on a story that came down to "who gets the girl."

I wanted to create a realistic marriage. I wanted Oscar Wilde to be in there. I wanted a homosexual love interest along with the heterosexual love interests in the story. A year and three months [later], when it came time to break down the door, I didn't want to do it.

I was sitting there and thinking "maybe Cerebus breaks in and saves them all." Come on Dave, I thought, you've had this story written all of this time and you want to bring in the biggest cliche going.

AH: *That would've been a Hollywood movie type of cliche.*

SIM: At the same time I wanted to do that scene, because I wanted the story to keep going. I wanted to see how all these people worked out their problems and whatnot. It was very funny coming face to face with myself as a writer going, "Please don't."

AH: *That suggests that this world is set in your mind.*

SIM: You'll hear this from just about any writer who has created characters that the public cares about; the characters take on a life of their own. You can have the best of intentions of saying, "I want this scene to go like this," but if it's not in Jaka's character, Jaka isn't going to say it.

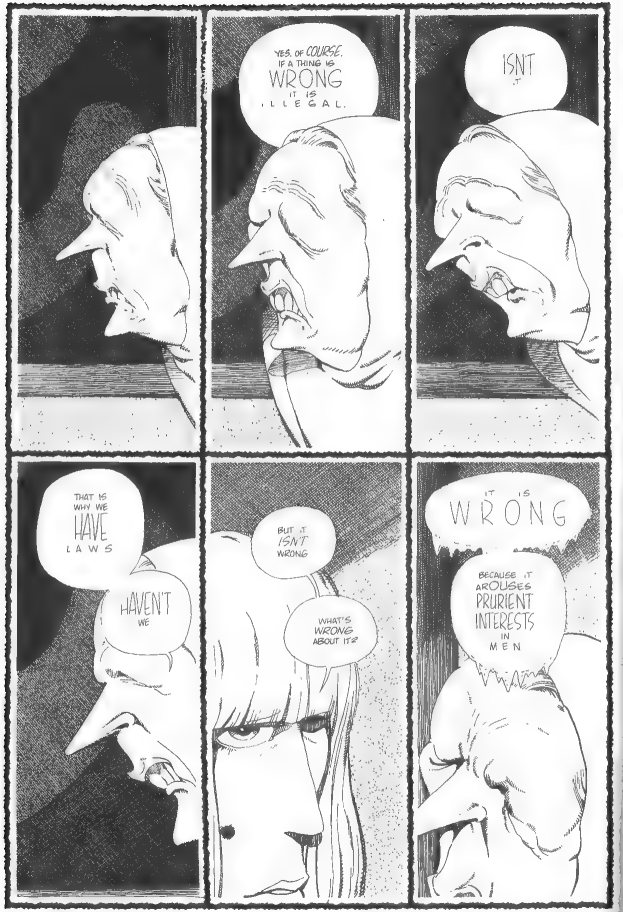
When Cerebus has Jaka fetched by Bear in "Church and State" after his marriage broke up, my original intention was to have him order Jaka to stay and then to play off that. I realized that even though Cerebus is incredibly stupid, insensitive and boorish, he wouldn't do something like that. It didn't work until I put down something that Cerebus would do.

AH: *It seems like the romance between Cerebus and Jaka is ill-fated; they never seem to be ready for each other at the same times.*

SIM: Serendipity interferes. The knock on the door at the wrong point. Oddly enough, I'm going through one of those right now.

Unpredictability & Reality

One of those things that happens by being a writer is that you do tend to


YES, OF COURSE. IF A THING IS WRONG IT IS ILLEGAL.
ISN'T IT?
THAT IS WHY WE HAVE LAWS
HAVEN'T WE
BUT IT ISN'T WRONG
WHAT'S WRONG ABOUT IT?
IT IS WRONG
BECAUSE IT AROUSES PRURIENT INTERESTS IN MEN

Mrs. Thatcher was great fun, says Sim.

admire whoever it is that's writing life. You have to be seized with admiration for the sheer plotline, the ability to bring in the right characters at the right time. To make things happen in a specific period.

How unpredictable everything is. We read newspapers every day and no one can predict what tomorrow's news is going to be.

AH: *People are incredibly unpredictable. That's part of what sets us apart from animals.*

SIM: Animals are pretty unpredictable too, I think. We may just not understand their particular unpredictability.

AH: *An interesting point.*

One of the things I find most fascinating about Cerebus *is that although I have some ideas about what may happen, I am up in the air about many, many things.*

SIM: That's the kind of entertainment that I like. It's what makes television very frustrating, and most movies. Practically from the time that you sit down, you know what's going to happen. Or at least you have a pretty good idea.

I worked very, very hard doing the book to get anything that extraneous out of there.

AH: *The first several issues of "Mothers and Daughters" have been the most surprising things I've read or seen in a long time. "Melmoth" and "Jaka's Story" are very down-to-earth, almost peaceful books. Even the events of the second half of "Jaka's Story" couldn't prepare me for issue #150.*

SIM: A lot of people forget the fact that I have been writing this for a long time. This is unique in any kind of literary sense, because no one before has created this sort of work and at the same time published it. And certainly not over the course of 26 years. That's what makes *Cerebus* very difficult to review. There's no way of knowing how the story ends, so the reviewer looks pretty foolish at the moment the next novel begins.

AH: *There was that review in* The Comics Journal *about the first half of "Jaka's Story," and the reviewer completely missed it.*

SIM: They do tend to leave me alone after awhile because they do get thinking, "I'm tired of looking foolish on this. I'll wait until he's done and then call it a piece of shit." I think if the reviewers don't take themselves too seriously, they can have fun with it. You can help people to get a Reader's Digest version of the thing, which I think is a great deal of the function of reviewer.

It's a little bit difficult to do a flat-out negative review, because most negative reviews have to be based on what the thing is. *Cerebus* has very little to do with what the reviewers say about it.

AH: *It's been a constant surprise.*

SIM: The example recently in terms of movies was the movie *Other People's Money.* The only review I read of it said, "It lacked a moral center." When I went to see the movie it was very odd because it was exactly the kind of writing that I like. The Danny DeVito character and the Gregory Peck character were at complete odds, but both of them were written sympathetically.

To me that's good writing. I have completely lost patience with entertainments that I know going in who the good guy is and who the bad guy is. There are no good guys. There are no bad guys.

AH: *A lack of moral center is a very strange criticism to have for any entertainment.*

SIM: It's the same thing as the expression "politically correct." There's no such thing as politically correct. The idea that, for example, all environmentalists are completely scrupulous individuals and all industrialists are a plague upon humanity. That's far, far less interesting than what is actually true. That diversity is a lot of the joy and beauty in life.

AH: *It seems like they're pushing a sort of conformity now.*

SIM: Yeah, the idea that there are right things to think and wrong things to think. Gradually they are getting themselves into a smaller and smaller box where "these are the only good people." This box contains nonsmokers, feminists, environmentalists, parents, people who aren't promiscuous. It's kind of a boring little box. Almost nothing about the politically correct is what they do, it's what they don't do.

AH: *They just sit around and read books about how good they are.*

SIM: [*laughter*] Not only how good they are, but how good the last person's book they read about how good they are.

AH: *You talked to me the other day about how you mainly wanted to talk about the book . . .*

SIM: That's the problem when you get me talking about reality.

Mothers & Daughters

AH: *You started to talk about how "Mothers and Daughters" is about birth and rebirth. Do you want to elaborate on that?*

SIM: Not really. One of the difficult things with talking about the book is that you can't really give surprises away, the problem being that you sort of have to talk generally, and the more generally you talk, the less actual information people are getting.

AH: *I'll ask a more specific question. How many issues will "Mothers and Daughters" run?*

SIM: Fifty issues. Just about exactly, I think, but I've been wrong before. "Church and State" was originally going to run through issue #100, and then it was going to run through issue #115, and then it ended up going through issue #111.

AH: *Will it have a lot of Cerebus in it?*

SIM: Yeah. I always find that a little odd because I think the book always has a lot of Cerebus in it. The fact that

As soon as daughters give birth, politically they become mothers.

he was just sitting on a chair, clutching a doll and a sword for a year, to me there was a lot of Cerebus in it. I think [when] most people ask that question, what they're asking is, "Will he be up fooling around and stuff?" Yeah, he does a certain amount of that.

AH: *I understand Cerebus will become Pope again?*

SIM: Umm, yeah. Briefly.

AH: *I felt very torn because on one hand I want to be completely surprised by the book. On the other hand, I feel a sort of responsibility to ask for some sort of preview.*

SIM: Heidi McDonald used to run into the same problem phoning about the *Amazing Heroes Preview Special* because it's not really the sort of book that lends itself to that sort of preview. "After their big galactic war, they come back to earth and rebuild their clubhouse" sort of thing.

I think I've really said all I really can say about "Mothers and Daughters."

Thematically, it is birth and rebirth. Cirin and Astoria figure prominently in the story as obviously the most profound mother/daughter type of relationship. Even though they're not blood relatives, there's no question they relate as mothers and daughters. Examining a little bit more of the distinctions between Cirinism and Kevilism. Cirinists are mothers and Kevilists are daughters.

Largely, and this is again something I see in reality, mothers tend to have specific characteristics and daughters tend to have specific characteristics, and as soon as daughters give birth, politically they become mothers. They could have been the most ardent fans of civil liberties, but the moment they become mothers, there isn't a civil liberty you can't take away that wouldn't make them absolutely deliri-

From an upcoming jam Between Chester Brown and Sim.

ous because it keeps their children safe.

Big Mother is Watching You

AH: *I have a 9-month old son at home and I see that change in myself and my wife. Not as strongly as you put it of course, but I am much more concerned with protecting my child now.*

SIM: There's also the fact that the people in it never see it. All you have to do is remember how you were before you had a child and you were a very different person. The problem is that parents tend to see themselves as having gone through an enlightening experience by having a child, and I find that exactly the opposite is true. Most of them go from being liberals to fascists. [*laughter*] Obviously, their first priority is that they want to keep their children safe. The people who stand up at meetings and their first credential is, "I have a 5-year-old daughter," it's like I don't care what you've got, what do you have to say? To a parent, you have a child, so consequently, you are a citizen elevated beyond other citizens into a new realm.

That was a lot of the point of using Margaret Thatcher. There would never be an unsafe person in a world run by Margaret Thatcher. But I wouldn't want to live in a world like that.

AH: *She's the only character in the book to be based directly on a real person.*

SIM: A lot of it was that I knew I'd be open to the charge that I'm a misogynist and, consequently, that's why I'm treating women this way. So it was necessary to go out and find a real Cirinist, somebody who is that way so there could be no denying it.

There is the wholesale belief that women are infinitely superior to men. You know, the belief that women don't do bad things. Women don't commit acts of bad faith. Women are just the noblest of God's creatures.

AH: *They don't manipulate either.*

SIM: They're not manipulative. All of these things. It's not that I'm doing an unsympathetic portrayal of Margaret Thatcher, I'm just doing the real Margaret Thatcher. The narrow-minded, pig-headed mother that is going to make everything safe for you, and any objections you make are just because you don't understand.

AH: *That is very much like a mother/daughter relationship—a lecture Thatcher's giving Jaka.*

SIM: Mothers are that way universally. Parents are that way universally; Steve Bissette's a good example. We were sitting in the middle of a debate of some kind. Scott McCloud had just said something. Steve pointed his finger directly at Scott and said, "Now, Scott . . ." and Scott shook his head a bit and said, "Yes, Steve." Steve definitely used the conversational gambit of someone who spends most of his day attracting someone's attention that way, pointing a finger at his son and saying, "Now (whatever his kid's name is). . ."

AH: *He draws such terrifying comics.*

SIM: He's just a big teddy bear. He is a family man. He dotes on his kids.

AH: *So we parents aren't all bad, Dave! [laughter]*

SIM: No, no, I didn't say that! I think that one part of the problem is that for too long we've had the belief that somehow the act of childbirth makes people better.

AH: *There's a certain amount of moral superiority that parents have.*

SIM: No question about it. I think that I'd be far more likely to vote someone for Prime Minister who drank a bit. Or drank a great deal. Who smoked dope. Who had some sort of imagination about him. But you'll never have anybody running for public office who's not a bland family man. I think that's one of the problems we have. We need imaginative solutions to the problems we have. Someone like Bush, it's like, put him out on the farm with all the grandchildren. It's obvious that's all he thinks about.

The American Tour

AH: *Okay, on to lighter topics. What are your plans for the 1992 American Tour?*

SIM: Basically to get out and meet the fans. It is one of those things that I have been remiss about. John Byrne's gone through the same thing—you enjoy it but it gets to be a bit much, and you want to get back to a life that does not include personal appearances.

AH: *And people fawning over you and giving you advice about what you should do. . .*

SIM: Obviously you'd be taking your life in your hands touring during "Melmoth" or "Jaka's Story" for exactly that reason. I don't really want to be talking to people when they're very upset about the book. A lot of it is also to try to promote the stores that are promoting the independents, to keep a store going that doesn't emphasize Marvel and DC. Also, I want to point out that there are a fair number of those stores out there.

AH: *You're going to 21 cities in the spring?*

SIM: Actually, it's all year. It's every other weekend.

I'm touring the way that the Rolling Stones do now, which is coming back home between stops. It would be nice to go out and do it all at once in a way, but I don't want to throw the book off schedule. Basically, what I'll be doing is working for the 10 or 11 days in between stops, including the weekends, and then going out that next weekend doing the tour thing, then coming back in on Monday and start drawing again.

I think it's going to be good. It started off as a time to go out and talk *Cerebus* up again, but it's turning into a larger thing. I'll be helping to promote other self-publishers. Colleen Doran will be at the Washington appearance since she lives in the Washington area. Martin Wagner, who does *Hepcats* will be in Houston and maybe another couple of cities along the tour. Steve Bissette will be premiering his new *Tyrant* series, which Spiderbaby Graphix will be self-publishing.

These are people who don't get mentioned that often in the fan press, since most of the field just talks about Marvel and DC.

A lot of my point here is to maybe change the dialogue a little bit. Much of the retail comics environment

We are one police officer and one parent away from a bust of any given point.

seems to be obsessed with the question of how to sell *Spider-Man* better or how to get the real world to go crazy for the *X-Men*. My attitude is that it's hopeless. The real world is not interested in *X-Men*.

AH: *Last night on the cable channel A&E I saw this report on art spiegelman.*

SIM: It seems obvious to me that a store would want to attract more adults. If you have a store that is 80% Marvel comics, most of the people that you're going to have in your store are not going to be very old.

If you could have a store that had books like *Cerebus*, *Love & Rockets*, *Yummy Fur*, *Maus*, *Elfquest*. . . If it also sold books of comics like *Doonesbury*, *Calvin and Hobbes*, *The Far Side*, *Garfield*, then you have something that's going to attract adults.

They know *Doonesbury* already. Then you put *Sandman* next to it. And the odds are that they're apt to pick it up and go, "Oh, what's this?"

AH: *Comics shops have weekly travel from Marvel and DC fans and they can count on them for cash-flow. But you can't predict when an adult's going to come in and look for a* Love & Rockets *collection or something.*

SIM: And they probably won't come in and look.

I was coming back on the train from an appearance in Montreal. This guy got on the train with his wife and

daughter. At one point in his conversation with his wife he said something about being over at that new collector's store in the mall. My ears sort of picked up. He was saying that they had hundreds and hundreds of comic books in this store. His wife seemed very interested.

He said, "I asked the guy what was going on with these comic books." Well, the store clerk sells him one of the bagged collections of *Robin II*, the five different versions of the same book.

So consequently, the guy says, "Yeah, he sold me this bagful of comics with Robin, you know, like Batman and Robin, and it's a Robin miniseries. The guy at the store said it was really hot." Then the guy on the train said, "I got it home and I read the first one. I thought it was all right. Then I picked up the second one, and guess what? They were all the same comic book!" So his wife said, "They saw you coming." And he said,"They put one over on me."

There's the classic guy that we keep talking about. This guy has now classified comics as a scam, as something that is completely worthless, as a bad idea. If anyone around him says anything about comic books for the next two years, he'll tell his story.

AH: *Adults are the ones with money to spend on the collections.*

SIM: And they're interested in adult things. It's stupid to give an advertising executive a copy of *Robin II* anyway. It's kind of neat that the book has a hologram on the cover, but the comic's putrid.

That's a lot of the reason I'm doing the tour. I had the option of going to those kinds of stores and persuading them to carry *Cerebus*. I chose instead to emphasize the stores that do emphasize the independents, who're trying to attract outside people, stores like Comics Experience, Moondog's in Chicago, the stores that carry everything.

I have no objections to somebody who has a walking ton of Marvel comics in his store if he carries everything else as well. But I did choose to avoid the stores that carry *Cerebus* for their subscribers and that's it. They'd rather have 15 *Punisher* comics. I think those stores are kinda hopeless.

AH: *The same stores that don't carry* Cerebus *or* Eightball *probably never carried* It's Science With Dr. Radium *or* Lloyd Llewellyn. *Why should they change now?*

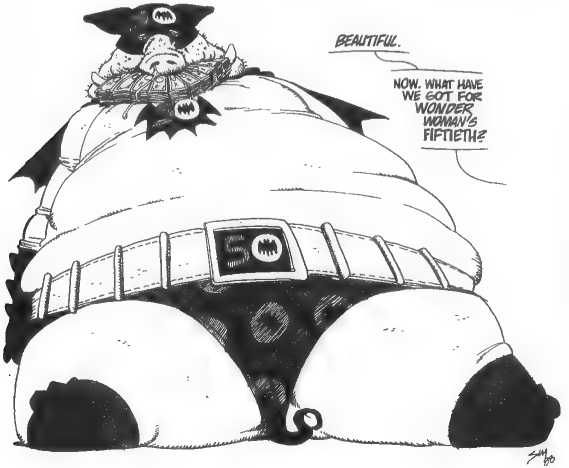
SIM: There are stores that do care, in the same sense that there are more publishers now who care. There are obviously things I can do with *Cerebus* that would get the circulation up very, very high. I'm not doing that because I'm not doing [*Cerebus*] to get the circulation up very, very high.

We independent publishers have to take a certain amount of satisfaction that there are stores which have the same attitude. They could maybe make more money having a wall full of *Punisher* or whatnot, but that's not what they want to do.

A great deal of my argument with the stores is that the owners are supposed to be running stores because they want to. If they just want to make money, they should be plumbers or something. So why not carry the stuff that you like? The stores got started and flourished back in the early '80s when there were only 50 or 75 titles on the market. Why can't they take the Diamond catalogue, and instead of ordering all 500 things that are being ordered, pick the 50 best ones? I get very frustrated with the attitude of "I like these but they won't sell." What makes your taste so extraordinary that you know that if you just carry the stuff you like, you'll go broke? I don't think that's true. I find the same thing happens with *Cerebus*. People say, "*Cerebus* is too complicated and difficult to understand." I say, "You understand it, don't you?" If you only carry the things that appeal to you, then at least you'll have better conversations in the store.

AH: *I've been wishing I could find that kind of store around here.*

SIM: That's the thing. Steve Rolhafer was doing all the research for St. Louis. He ended up finding surprising stores. There was one that sold almost all graphic novels. That was great; I had no idea it even existed.



Editorial cartoons from *WAP!*

Mainstream Drought

We have to realize that all of these things take a great deal of time. One of the luxuries we have is time. Marvel and DC are running out of time because they don't have the best people anymore. Alan Moore's not coming back. Frank Miller's not coming back. I wouldn't expect Neil Gaiman to stay very long after he's done with *Sandman* And they're not getting good guys anymore. The stores are sitting there waiting for the next *Watchmen* or *Dark Knight*. It's not going to happen.

AH: *People like Jim Lee and Todd McFarlane are doing work for Marvel. [This interview was conducted before Lee & McFarlane left Marvel to form Image.—TH]*

SIM: There are people in rotation. They get their month and a half at the top of the heap and then they're gone again. It's not like how Neal Adams was, or like John Byrne and Chris Claremont were.

AH: *Or even Alan Moore.*

SIM: Or even Alan Moore. The fame doesn't sustain itself. By the time you've done 16 issues of the adjectiveless *Spider-Man*, that's it. Everybody's seen your bag of tricks. So you'd better figure out something else to do.

Sales are dropping because everyone orders enormous quantites of number ones, and then starts cutting, and then, boom, you just become another guy on the block.

AH: *Marvel and DC seem to be moving towards a burnout. There's only so much crap that fans will take before thay just say no.*

SIM: One of the great things about doing the tour now is that I can see it coming up. They're running out of tricks. When they start doing things like die-cut covers and holograms, they're really scrapping the barrel. They don't know why they aren't doing as well as they did when *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight* were coming out. Marvel and DC are having to come up with these dumb gimmicks—scams really, the comic book equivalent of junk bonds—to sustain their growth. And that growth is only an illusion, because all they're doing is killing their own sales on their other books.

AH: *They're only exploiting their own market.*

SIM: This is the first time in the entire history of the direct sales market that there are unhappy retailers. There are a certain number of retailers who are saying, "Hey, look, this is going to come to an end at some point. Whatever we had three or four years ago that looked like it was going to take off and become a big amazing thing has become a sort of farm team for movies or has become a place to basically bilk 13-year-olds out of their money with collectors' items that will never be worth anything. This is not what the promise of *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight* was. That's not what we all started believing in." It was one thing when Alan and Frank and a couple of other creators were saying it stunk out loud. But nothing's really going to change until it gets down to the retail level.

When they start doing things like die-cut covers and holograms, they're really scraping the barrel.

AH: *Marvel's response to all this is to double the size of their line.*

SIM: That's it. That's it. It's a transparent money grab. Whatever good faith Marvel had in the retail community can be summed up in two words: Carol Kalish. And now they don't have anybody. So I think people are starting to wake up and say, "This is it, you can't keep your little party going."

AH: *It sounds like you have a lot of hope.*

SIM: Very much so. Particularly talking to the retailers. WAM! was such a colossal failure because you can't fool retailers. Marvel was trying to pirate away store customers. As much as they promise and swear they're not doing it, there's no reason to start that

kind of club unless you're trying to steal business. And from what I understand, they have virtually nobody joining that stupid club. That's good, because it is just a stupid club.

AH: *Raising their prices by a quarter is what I think will really break them.*

SIM: I hope so. I hope everybody is going to scream out loud, "what the hell kind of deal is it when we give you your best year ever and you still put the books up a quarter?"

Censorship

AH: *One other thing I really wanted to ask you about was the Comics Legends Legal Defense Fund. You did a great cover for* True North II.

SIM: Whether it was great or not depends on your sense of humor.

Many people didn't find it funny at all, particularly the feminists. Not to use a blanket condemnation—there were feminists who liked it—but the ones I specified on the cover, the knee-jerk feminists who just found it politically incorrect. It summed up completely my opinions on the subject.

When they said, "There's been another bust and we're doing another benefit," I found out that the CLLDF had to push the store to defend itself. Most of the store owners just want to throw up their hands when they get busted, which makes you realize that the publishers of the busted books aren't going to help the stores at all. They're all too happy to take advantage of creative freedom, but try to find them when it's time to defend freedom in a court of law.

Obviously you have to defend the Barry Blairs of the world because otherwise you're saying, "I'll defend this but I won't defend that," in which case you're just as much part of the problem as anyone else. You've got to defend the stuff that doesn't appeal to you, the stuff that sickens you, because otherwise you'll just open the door for everybody to shut you down.

AH: *Obviously, many good comics have sex scenes in them, like* Love & Rockets *or* Yummy Fur. . .

SIM: Yeah. There's nothing you could bring in as a hard and fast rule that wouldn't at some point step on Alan Moore's toes. Or step on Frank Miller, or someone else.

AH: *I was very surprised that* Big Numbers *#1 was seized at the Canadian border.*

SIM: It's very arbitrary. When you talk about Canada, you're talking about a country with very poor laws. One of the reasons I'll be doing art auctions for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund on the tour is that at least there is some basis for defending obscenity charges in the United States. In Canada, it all depends on what a Customs officer wants to do.

If you take a mother and a police officer in tandem, they can virtually take away anybody's civil rights.

AH: *It's terrible, but true.*

SIM: Most males don't walk around saying, "That thing has to be wiped out." When *The 700 Club* comes on, I don't watch it. I don't go out and march and try to get it off the air. I think there's nothing more disgusting than bilking old people out of their money, but at the same time, I'm not one of those guys who says you have to wipe it out.

AH: *There's an implication here that you're being busted because your comics are so vile even adults would be harmed by reading it.*

SIM: That is a reasonably widely-held viewpoint. Obviously, it's one of the things that worries me more than anything else in our environment. We are one police officer and one parent away from a bust at any given point.

The nice thing about the United States is that you do have the First Amendment.

A shadowy sequence from "Melmoth."

I PRACTICALLY OVER LOOKED IT BECAUSE OF THE TITLE
DAUGHTER OF PALNU
THERE IT WAS SURROUNDED BY "SOLDIERS OF PALNU" "MERCHANT OF PALNU" "WINDS OF PALNU" "PASSIONS OF PALNU" "RELIGION OF PALNU" AND "TOMERS OF PALNU"
ALL OF WHOM SEEMED TO BE LEANING AWAY FROM HER
AS IF LITERACY WERE SOME MANNER OF VIOLENT CONTAGION

WHEN THE WATERS RECEDE
THE SURVIVING MEMBERS OF WHATEVER SOCIETY IS AROUND AT THE TIME...
TURN TO THEIR RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR AN EXPLANATION
...THE MOONIES PRAISE

The Jules Feiffer character from "Walking on the Moon."

Back to *Cerebus*

AH: *I had all these questions prepared about the comic, and I seem to be getting you on these big topics.*

SIM: Why don't you run through them and I'll give you quick answers.

AH: *Will the Roach or Elrod show up in "Mothers and Daughters"?*

SIM: The Roach is featured very prominently in the issue I'm drawing even as we speak.

AH: *So "Mothers and Daughters" will have humorous elements to it, unlike the last two novels?*

SIM: Oh yes, humor, very definitely. Humor is coming back in a big way. The story lends itself to humor, far more than "Jaka's Story" or "Melmoth" did. It's been a real party. I'm working on issue #154 right now, on page 16, and the Roach is back again and he's having this absolute religious experience of having figured out everything that's gone on.

It will be a very popular issue, I know it already.

AH: *I take it the book will be a bit faster moving now.*

SIM: Oh, yeah.

AH: *That's been one of the big criticisms you've been getting lately.*

SIM: Well, a lot of the problem is that the book is a book. There are parts of it that are fast moving and there are parts of it that aren't. I just happen to be at one of those fast moving parts.

In the first fifth of "Mothers and Daughters," the first 12 issues, it will be the equivalent of flipping around the channels of your television set. It just keeps getting faster and faster.

I had no idea what people's reactions would be. I thought, "Maybe they're not going to like this," but I sure knew right away. Issue #151 was obviously full to bursting. Everybody liked it, so I thought if the readers liked that issue, they'll love the next ten.

AH: *I know you've said in the past that you don't let fan criticism bother you. Does it sometimes get to you?*

SIM: It depends on the day. There isn't as much of it from the *Cerebus* fans as there is from the outside. "I don't get this. I don't understand what he's driving at. This doesn't make a whole lot of sense." But I'm not doing the book for them. Mostly I'm doing the book for myself. I'm doing it for the ones who started reading it with #108 and over the course of three days bought everything that had Cerebus on it.

AH: *There's an amazing number of people who've done just that.*

SIM: *Cerebus* is one of those things which lends itself to that. If you read the first volume of *Cerebus* and go, "Wow, that was neat, I really liked that," odds are that you will like the rest of it.

There really isn't any other story of this length. It's already up to 3000 pages. The biggest problem people seem to face is the whiplash of getting caught up. You read all five books and then you realize you have to wait a whole month and then all you get is 20 pages of story.

AH: *You've stated that "Mothers and Daughters" starts the feminine cycle of the book. What do you mean by that?*

SIM: If you look at the novels that make up the first 150 issues, they tend to have very male concerns: organized religion, politics, love from a male perspective in "Jaka's Story." "Mothers and Daughters" is a far closer examination of women.

I tend to do a graduation between stories. The beginning of "Jaka's Story" sort of echoes the end of "Church and State," the same way that the beginning of "Church and State" was very much like "High Society."

If you look at the novels that make up the first 150 issues, they tend to have very male concerns... "Mothers and Daughters" is a far closer examination of women.

I've been writing "Mothers and Daughters" basically since 1979. So it's twelve years of very, very close observation of females. You're going to find what I think women are like in "Mothers and Daughters."

The Long Run

AH: *That leads to my next question: how far ahead do you have the book*

Dave Sim and Kevin Eastman divide the world into spheres of influence (Treaty of New Tordesillas, 1991).

plotted? Do you really know what the storyline's going to be that leads up to issue #300?

SIM: Yeah. Actually there were two storylines. I couldn't figure out how to resolve them because I felt like I was building one storyline and the other storyline contradicted it completely. But then the two of them resolved each other together about a month or month-and-a-half ago.

So yes, I've got it up to issue #300.

AH: *You have a specific idea for the next few issues and it gets more vague as it goes on?*

SIM: Right. As I was saying about "Jaka's Story," I knew the ending of the novel before I knew any of the rest of it. Basically, I knew what I wanted to say in the first half of it but I didn't have all of them written. But the ending was just a transcription job. Same thing with "Church and State." It only makes sense that by the time you get to the last 100 pages of writing something that you've been thinking about for seven years, you've got it pretty clear in your mind.

AH: *I'm really getting intrigued by "Mothers and Daughters" now.*

Will you absolutely, positively end the book with issue #300?

SIM: That is pretty much a hard and fast kind of thing. There would be some question as to whether "Mothers and Daughters" would end in issue #200, but no, in terms of actually bumping up against the ending, no, #300 will do it. There's no question about that.

AH: *As far as I know, you're the only cartoonist who's ever said, "I'm going to do 300 issues of this and then that's it. That's one of the more intriguing aspects of the book.*

SIM: I think there's no question about that. I had decided that in 1979 and I'm sure that absolutely nobody took it seriously until . . .I'm sure there are still many readers who don't take it seriously: "there's absolutely no way he's going to do that." It makes sense to me, but then a lot of it is that I have a big story to tell. I figure it needs the room, and is very satisfying to me.

Favorites

AH: *Have you been happy with how all the issues have turned out?*

SIM: Yeah, I'd say so. At a specific level, everybody doesn't like their own work. You can always look at your work and see things wrong with it. That's really how people improve. The guys who look at their own work and don't see anything wrong with it are the guys who never get better.

There are things I like better than others. People still think issue #44 was one of the best—the "wuffa wuffa wuffa" issue.

AH: *That's one of my favorites.*

SIM: That was a cakewalk to me. I didn't do anything in there that challenged me in any way. I did it because I was going on tour and I needed a quick issue.

I'm doing the Roach again for basically the same reason. I need a quick issue that I could walk through with my eyes closed. And Gerhard's in hysterics. He's reading it and laughing out loud.

AH: *Do you have any favorite characters? You mentioned once you really like Jaka.*

SIM: Yeah, I really like knowing her; I like writing her. In terms of being fun to draw, Margaret Thatcher was a lot of fun.

AH: *You did a hell of a caricature of her!*

SIM: She's back in the issues I'm doing right now. Actually she's in #153 and in #154 again. The nice thing about Margaret Thatcher is that you can't draw her wrong. As long as you have these five elements in her face, no matter which way her nose is facing or how large her nose is, as long as it's pointing the same way as the chin—both usually look alike—it's always Margaret Thatcher.

AH: *I really saw your love for Mick Jagger and Keith Richards come out in their issues.*

SIM: There's no question about it. They took over those issues. Originally they were a four-panel walk-on, and it was two issues later before I could get rid of them. I was just talking to Ken Viola yesterday. He's the guy who did the *Masters of Comic Books* video. He's a roadie for the Stones. I asked him if I did a caricature of Mick Jagger, could he get Jagger to sign it for auctioning at the New York City stop on the tour. He said he'd definitely give it a try.

AH: *A little bit of a fanboy dream for you.*

SIM: Oh yeah. Ken showed the *Cerebus* issues with Mick and Keith in them to Jagger and Jagger said he liked them and it was like, "Wow! Pretty cool, boy!"

Everybody's a fanboy about something.

Fans & Letters

AH: *You've gotten your share of fanboy letters that have appeared in 'Aardvark Comment.'*

SIM: I suppose you could look at it that way, but I like the letters page. I think it's great.

I have sat next to all kinds of artists—independent artists, Marvel and DC artists—and I would say I have the best fans in comics.

AH: *The letters page really has a life of its own.*

SIM: Oh yeah, definitely. There's no question about that. As soon as I stopped answering letters, the character of the letters completely changed, which was very interesting. I'm not one of those people who's very big on family, but I can certainly understand that there are a lot of people out there who are like that. They think of *Cerebus* and *Cerebus* readers as a kind of surrogate family. They're all pretty good about it.

I was reading Harlan Ellison's "Xenogenesis" or whatever it's called, in *The Comics Buyer's Guide*, where he wrote about what bad fans are like. I can't say I ever had an experience like that.

We don't really have anybody here answering phones. I answer my own phones. It's not like it rings off the hook. People call up to order a book and they say, "Umm, can I ask who I'm talking to?" I say "Dave Sim," and they're like, "Oh, wow, bluh bluh bluh bluh bluh." They'll be fanboys for a little while, but then they'll realize I'm working. They say what they have to say. Or they'll say, "Can I ask you a question?" And I'll say, "You just did." And they'll say, "Can I ask you another question?" and I say, "You just did." But they'll have have a question like how do you pronounce the city that Cerebus is in? Or how do you pronounce Cerebus? I answer them in a few sentences, we talk for a little while, and then they hang up. It's no big deal. I don't feel like I have to have a security guard around me.

AH: *You're at a nice level of fame.*

SIM: It's very, very nice. It's just wonderful. A lot of it is that because of the letters page, there is a way to be a part of it. I think most of the time when fans become a menace or threatening in some way, it's because they don't have any other access. With *Cerebus*, they know if they send a letter to me, I'll read it. I haven't been able to answer the fan mail lately, but if it's something that needs an answer, or somebody's bent out of shape about something, I'll answer.

AH: *The only time I wish you'd answer the questions is when people send you lists of questions about the book.*

SIM: I was thinking of maybe doing a top ten list, the top ten questions every issue.

Conclusion

AH: *Do you have any plans to reprint any of the other* Cerebus *stories that don't fall into the big storyline, like the* Epic *or* Swords *stories?*

SIM: I'm always considering it. I think at some point all of that stuff will have to get printed, just because there is so much interest in it. A lot of the problem is that the *Swords* back-up stories are usually done with somebody, and that becomes in a way an accounting problem. What do you pay somebody who did a story with you?

Every time we do a printing of "Church and State" Volume Two, we send Bob Burden a check. But it's an arbitrary amount. How much do you compensate the guy for reprinting the Flaming Carrot crossover again?

AH: *I guess you get a few bucks every time they reprint the Cerebus/Ninja Turtles story.*

SIM: Actually, we agreed not to reprint that one. I ended up getting a check. That became awkward, because they were doing the reprints through First Comics. I sure as hell didn't want any money from First Comics—there's corporate America at its finest at First.

AH: *They're gone now. . .*

SIM: That's good, that's good. In time we're getting rid of 'em.

I got a check for the reprinting that Mirage did. First Comics owed Mirage a lot of money, and because they went in and sued First Comics, I got a share of that. That was okay, that was money that punished First. I was all for that.

AH: *Do you have anything else you want to say to* Amazing Heroes *readers?*

SIM: Well, I don't want to sound like I'm totally down on Marvel. These comics have their place. We've got to go a little easy on people who are finding Marvel comics for the first time. All of us found Marvel comics for the first time. It was a real charge at the time. Certainly in my case, and also in the case of some other guys, we have to learn not to cast as many aspersions on the people who are keeping Marvel in business, who are called Marvel Zombies. As long as we can reach a happier split where a certain number of stores specialize in independents and have adult customers, there should always be a Marvel shop on the corner. I don't doubt in short order that Marvel would open one. These people should have a place.

It's difficult enough to find a place where comics are taken seriously. Somebody walking in there shouldn't have to defend the fact that they like *Avengers West Coast* or something like that. ●

Everybody's a fanboy about something.

Gerhard Interview by Jason Sacks

"I LIKE TO DRAW PICTURES"

Gerhard (that's right, just Gerhard, no last name) has been Dave Sim's assistant on Cerebus for a number of years now, but has never been interviewed in the fan press. Perhaps that is because he's a less controversial figure, or perhaps it's just because nobody was quite sure what Gerhard does on the book. Here, Gerhard explains just what it is he does for Cerebus, as well as how he got together with Dave. . . awww, just read the interview.

AMAZING HEROES: *How did you come to work on* Cerebus?

GERHARD: How did I know that was going to be your first question? That's a long story. Dave and I get asked that question a lot, and neither of us can remember how we first met. Kitchener [Ontario, where we both live] is a fairly small town, and both of us were involved in drawing at the time. I was just doing my own stuff.

I was also working at the local art supply store. I was doing the deliveries and Dave was the guy I delivered the *Cerebus* tone to. And I was best man at the wedding of Dave's ex-wife's sister. So somehow through all that we ended up meeting each other.

It started when Archie Goodwin asked me if I wanted to do something for *Epic* magazine. I told him that if I could do it in color, then so much the better. That was what I was doing at that time, pen and ink illustrations with color on top of them. So Dave laid up the pages with Cerebus on them and I put in the backgrounds and colored it up and we sent it off to Epic. He loved it; we did a few more. Then we started going to a few cons, selling color sketches. Then he asked me to do the book and I said yes.

AH: *Yeah, now that I think of it,* Epic *was the first place I remember seeing your work on* Cerebus.

You've done some art on your own?

GERHARD: I was doing mostly commercial stuff, stuff for newspaper ads. The one quote I always like is that a lady at an ad told me to draw a frozen beef pie in pointilism and make it look delicious. I also presented a show where I did 18 or 20 pieces, framed them all up, and it took me a year and a half to sell them all. So I decided that was not the way to go.

AH: *Do you have the ambition to do a comic of your own?*

GERHARD: When I was trying to come up with a way to draw for a living, comics never occurred to me. I knew Dave was doing one at that time, but it really never occurred to me. When I started working on *Cerebus* with Dave, it was a whole new thing. Just doing the job that I'm doing now takes up all my time. And I'm really not a writer. I really don't have an overwhelming need to tell a story. I like to draw pictures.

AH: *I understand the set-up is that Dave draws all the figures and you draw the backgrounds. How did that arrangement evolve? I remember that just before you started on the book, Dave was not heavily into drawing backgrounds. Did you come on board to take care of that?*

GERHARD: At the time, Dave concentrated more on the characters and the story. Like you say, his backgrounds were sketchy. What he was doing was that he would give you one panel as an establishing shot and the backgrounds would tend to disappear after that.

When I get the pages, all the characters are fully rendered and inked; the word balloons are in place and inked; the panel borders are there. Usually there's just a rough indication of what the backgrounds should be. Most of the time I can just tell from the movement of the characters within a certain room. I have floorplans of the rooms, overviews of it, and I can just figure out where the characters are. I just take my sightlines from there.

AH: *Have you designed the houses and rooms in the book, or do both of you do that?*

GERHARD: That varies from time to time. The room that Melmoth died in, Dave designed that. In "Jaka's Story," I designed the little community there. But Jaka's apartment, [that was] Dave and [his ex-wife] Deni's first apartment they had together here in Kitchener. It had been torn down, so he just gave me a verbal description of it. I tried to re-create it as best I could.

AH: *So you enjoy doing background work as opposed to figure drawing, then?*

GERHARD: Figure drawing has never been my strong point. I've always done better at landscapes, architecture and inanimate objects.

AH: *A lot of people I talk to in comics seem to hate backgrounds. Backgrounds are usually the first things to go.*

GERHARD: I started working with Dave when his backgrouds were disappearing, and all I do is backgrounds. So it's a good team-up.

AH: *Do you have any input on the story?*

GERHARD: No so much input as a sounding board. Dave will bounce ideas off me and if I laugh when he wants me to laugh, then it will probably go over. If I laugh when I'm not supposed to laugh, then he knows it probably won't go over. But as far as actual input into the storyline, dialogue or anything like that, no. It's Dave's baby. It's Dave's book.

AH: *Do you have any favorite characters or issues you've especially enjoyed?*

GERHARD: While you're working on an issue it's really weird. It's your favorite and your least favorite at the same time. You're never totally happy with how the work turns out. There's always something you want to do better the next time.

But issues? I always thought the dream issues were fun. Just because you could do anything and get away with it, I suppose. Each current issue seems to be the highlight. But you always try to do better with the next one.

I'd have to say "Jaka's Story" as a whole. It's basically a self-contained story, for one thing. You can show that reprint book to people, and because it's all contained in that one setting, there's a real wholeness there that I like. A unity.

AH: *What's your perspective on "Mothers and Daughters?"*

GERHARD: At this point in the story, Dave's doing what he calls zapping. It's like when you're punching around the channels. You're here, you're there, then you're over here, you cut to this, then you see what's going on here. I imagine that storylines like the development of the Punisheroach will be carried over the next few issues, yeah. You'll also be finding out what's going on with Cerebus, where he's disappeared to. I guess I really shouldn't say anything else about it.

AH: *Anything else people ask you at cons that I missed?*

GERHARD: One question I get a lot is if Gerhard is my first or my last mmm.

AH: *For awhile they had this thing in the letters column about giving you a last name. . . .*

GERHARD: We never got a winning entry, so we just sort of forgot about it. So I just stick with "Gerhard."

AH: *I always liked "Gerhard Throat-Warbler Mangrove."* ●

THE TEN BEST

by Lou Mougin

The Avengers is my very favorite Marvel title and has been since issue #1 in 1963. Why? Maybe it's the thrill of seeing practically every extant Marvel hero interacting with almost every *other* Marvel hero, either as an Avenger or as a guest star. Maybe it's the long run of good writers for the first century-and-a-half of issues: Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, and Steve Englehart. Maybe it's the good artists associated with the title, like Jack Kirby, Don Heck, John Buscema, George Perez, John Byrne, Barry Smith, Neal Adams, Gene Colan, Don Newton, and a batch of others. Maybe it's the Big Three: Captain America, Thor, and Iron Man. It's probably all of those mixed with a lot of nostalgia and the good stories that make *The Avengers* the best conglomerate hero-team book ever done.

Out of that, it's hard to pick ten stories which I consider the best while leaving so many others just as good untouched. I apologize to all those creators whose stories were left out, and I'll admit to a bias for the *Avengers* stories from 1963-76. But I still think these hold up as the 10 Best, so here we go:

1) *Avengers* #4: "Captain America Joins the Avengers"
Stan Lee, writer; Jack Kirby and Paul Reinman, artists.

I've said it elsewhere and I'll repeat it here: *Avengers #4* is probably the most important issue of the title's entire run, thanks to its revival of Captain America. The Hulk had been moved out two issues earlier thanks to incompatibility. That left a space open for a character Stan and Jack had been champing at the bit to revive for a long time, the last of the Timely trio supreme to be restored. First there was the Torch (in the person of Johnny Storm), then the Sub-Mariner, and finally, Captain America. (Fittingly enough, the original Human Torch, the Sub-Mariner, and Cap have all done time as Avengers.)

With this issue, they cut loose with all the emotion and action they could muster, and there are few '60s fans who can't quote you this one chapter and verse. From Namor's cracking open the iceberg holding the mysterious figure, to Cap's recovery and revival by the Avengers and his revelation of Bucky's death, to his struggle to reorient himself in a world 19 years advanced from his last memories, to his battle against a horde of thugs, the

Avengers #4: the rebirth of Captain America (art by Jack Kirby).

AVENGERS STORIES

Avengers #57: the first appearance of the Vision, who became the core of the Avengers (art by Sal Buscema).

Avengers' fracas with the Sub-Mariner, and the final scene of Cap placing his hand atop those of the other Avengers and being inducted into the team, this one had it all.

It added a new chapter to the Marvel Universe, and one quote from the story sums it all up. A cop, realizing that Captain America has really returned, blurts out, "But you've come back—just when the world has need of such a man—just like fate planned it this way! Forgive me, Cap, willya? I-I seem to have something in my eye!"

2. *Avengers* #89-97: The Skrull-Kree War

Roy Thomas, writer; Sal Buscema, Neal Adams, and John Buscema, artists.

Practically everyone will mention this high among their list of *Avengers* favorites as well. The major reason is, of course, Neal Adams' art on the middle chapters of this opus, but let's not slight Roy Thomas' far-reaching imagination and scripting nor the talents of the Buscema brothers. And without the breadth of the story—a crusade to save Earth from two warring galactic armadas who could turn it into a hairball, plus the added extras of Ant-Man's journey into the Vision's rococo interior and the fight to liberate the Inhumans—this story might not have made it up to the number two spot either.

I also have to mention one of my own favorite bits: Rick Jones conjuring up a horde of Timely heroes to defeat the Kree army. This is one of Marvel's most satisfying space operas, right up there with the Galactus trilogy and the Thanos saga, and it formed a nice crescendo to the twilight of Roy's stint on *The Avengers*. One of the tops of *any* list.

3. *Avengers Annual* #7: "The Final Threat"/*Marvel Two-in-One Annual* #2: "Death Watch"

Jim Starlin, writer-artist; Joe Rubinstein, finishing artist.

These two issues may be the best comics produced by Marvel in the late '70s, and providing a last glimpse of the great Second Generation Marvel of the early-to-mid-'70s. In these books, Jim Starlin wound up the Adam Warlock saga to fever pitch and climaxed it with a one-two punch: Warlock's death in the former book and Thanos' in the latter. Starlin was easily the greatest Marvel artist-writer between Steranko and Miller, and he proved it on every page of this two-parter.

In brief, a group of Avengers teams with Captain Marvel, Warlock, the Thing, and Spider-Man to first prevent Thanos from destroying every star in the cosmos, and then from blitzing Earth's own sun. Starlin manages real suspense in this one, as Thanos outpowers any individual Avenger (except possibly Thor) and even a small contingent of them, and gives us a shattering battle that is only-just-barely-won in fine Marvel tradition by a valiant Spider-Man and a Warlock who returns from the grave to do in his nemesis. It was one we'd been waiting for a long time, and Starlin didn't let us down. These two are classics.

4. *Avengers* #16: "The Old Order Changeth"

Stan Lee, writer; Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers, artists.

The line-up of the Avengers was unstable since the beginning; the first change took place in issue #2 when the Hulk quit. But this was the first mass change-over issue of them all, with Iron Man, Giant-Man, the Wasp, and an absent Thor abdicating their Avengership to go their diverse ways and leaving Captain America in charge of training three ex-super-villains as their replacements: Hawk-eye, Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch.

Back then, if you were a kid reading it, you could easily get choked up along with Iron Man as he opened the door to present the new Avengers to their first public appearance, and then muttered to himself, "The old must ever give way to the new! And yet—! And yet, so long as I may live, I'll never forget the words—*Avengers Assemble!* I'll never forget what they stood for!" Forgive me, Shellhead, willya? I seem to have something in my eye. . . .

5. *Avengers* #57-58: "Behold the Vision" & "Even an Android Can Cry"

Roy Thomas, writer; John Buscema and George Klein, artists.

These two issues presented the character who would soon symbolize the Avengers in their second decade, the Vision. Taking the name, a bit of the appearance, and nothing else from the Timely character of the same name, Roy Thomas crafted the first android Avenger, who first was a tool of their robotic enemy Ultron, then their ally, and, finally, an Avenger. Moreover, he provided a link to a never-forgotten character from issue #9, as Viz turned out to have the brain patterns of the long-dormant Wonder Man.

With his unique density powers, his computer brain, and his well-crafted costume, the Vision became the most impressive latter-day addition to the ranks, and gave us a memorable scene in a one-page fade-out: upon learning he had been accepted as an equal—and as a member—by the other Avengers, the Vision turned away, and we all learned that at least *this* android could cry.

6. *Avengers* #129-135 & *Giant-Size Avengers* #2-4: The Celestial Madonna Saga

Steve Englehart, writer; Sal Buscema, Joe Staton, Dave Cockrum, and others, artists.

Steve Englehart pulled off an ambitious stunt here, interweaving three double-sized quarterly editions of *Giant-Size Avengers* together with the monthly books—kind of like Chester Gould making sure that you could follow *Dick Tracy* regardless of whether you read the daily strips, the Sundays, or both. And we see the "cosmic epic" again here—the story the Avengers seem so well suited to *if* it is properly handled.

The primary players are: Kang, the Avengers' greatest nemesis; and Mantis, who is destined to become the Celestial Madonna if she can ever figure out just what her true origin is in time.

In the midst of all this, we get: Pharoah Rama-Tut and Immortus, both of whom are other identities of Kang; the deaths of the Swordsman and Iron Man (the latter of whom is restored by Immortus); the "true" origin of the Vision (he's supposed to be the original Human Torch, but John Byrne said later that he wasn't); the cosmic origins of the Skrull and Kree; a team of Communist villains who function as super-heroes in their own land; a bunch of dead bad guys returned from the grave; the dread Dormammu; the marriage of Mantis to the Swordsman's revived body; the marriage of the Scarlet Witch to the Vision; and more cross-references than you could expect any index to list. This is *the* ultimate Englehart Avengers story.

7. *Avengers Annual* #2: "And Time, the Rushing River"

Roy Thomas, writer; Don Heck, Werner Roth, and Vince Colletta, artists.

I've always had a weakness for this one, if only for the fact that it shows how the original Avengers, complete with the Hulk, could mop up on *anybody* in the Marvel Universe if they wanted to—and, by golly, that's just what the Scarlet Centurion gets them to do in this one! All the goodies, all the baddies, anybody who even looks like he's gonna get super-powers gets whupped on by Thor, Iron Man, Giant-Man, the Wasp, and the Hulk. Then they let the whole world know that if anybody tries any scientific experiments that just might accidentally super-ize anybody,

PART THREE
BEHOLD THE MANDROIDS!
YOU ARE ONE OF THE KREE... THE ALIEN MAN-MONSTERS WHO WOULD DEVOUR THIS GOLF-PLAYING PLANET!
CONFESS IT!
YES... CONFESS! CONFESS!
PENCILS BY: NEAL ADAMS

Avengers #94: a striking page of Neal Adams art from the "Kree-Skrull War."

they're gonna get stomped. All the mutants had good enough sense to keep quiet. (Wish they'd stayed that way.)

This was all on an alternate time-plane, and the Scarlet Centurion, who was really Kang in another suit, brought in the 1968 Avengers to beat their predecessors by applied sneakiness. Then *he* whomped the 1968ers, being more powerful than them but a lot less mighty than the original Mighty A's. But Ant-Man, a.k.a. Goliath, applies enough applied sneakiness to pull the rug out from under Centy, time gets straightened out again, the Watcher turns up to explain a few dangling plot elements before robbing everybody of their memory, and life goes on. This one's just fun!

8. *Avengers* #59-60: "The Name is Yellowjacket" & "Till Death Do Us Part"

Roy Thomas, writer; John Buscema, George Klein, and Mike Esposito, artists.

These issues were the Avengers' equivalent of Reed and Sue's wedding in *Fantastic Four Annual #3*. . .with a twist. The guy the Wasp wanted to marry, Yellowjacket, claimed to have murdered her ex-boyfriend, Henry Pym, known at that time as Goliath. This notwithstanding, YJ was a cocky super-hero whose personality differed from the staid Pym's about as far as Captain America's did from Hawkeye's. With the other Avengers fuming, and a horde of heroes attending, the Wasp did indeed tie the knot with Yellowjacket. And as soon as the Ringmaster and company crashed the party, we discovered that Yellowjacket was Henry Pym himself! O.K., so you know it now, but we didn't know it then, and it made for a good story.

9. *Avengers* #115-118/*Defenders* #8-11: The Avengers-Defenders Clash

Steve Englehart, writer; Bob Brown, Sal Buscema, and others, artists.

This is another of the Avengers' "big bash" stories that they seem to do so well (though it can equally be claimed to belong to the Defenders), and brought together most of the superstars of the Marvel Universe as active participants in the super-hero fight to end all super-hero fights. The story was batted back and forth between both *Avengers* and *Defenders* titles for four months, letting the individual heroes each have a chapter to themselves, until the end bit where all concerned had to enter the Dark Dimension to save the universe from heavy-hitters Loki and Dormammu.

Though flawed in a few places (such as why the Avengers were so eager to

Marvel Two-in-One Annual #2: Jim Starlin's apocalyptic battle between the Avengers, their allies and Thanos.

believe Loki when he told them the Defenders were bad guys?), this story has the air of a Secret Wars done right, and Stainless Steve pulled off another winner with it.

10. *Avengers* #14: "Even Avengers Can Die"

Stan Lee, Larry Ivie, and Larry Leiber, writers; Jack Kirby, Don Heck, and Chic Stone, artists.

This one remains memorable after x-number of years because of the emotion Stan and company poured into it, starting with Giant-Man and company tearing off to the nearest hospital with a critically wounded Wasp. A bullet has penetrated her lung, and without the aid of a certain doctor, her death is certain. Giant-Man comes to the brink of cracking up more than a few times here (like Reed Richards—when one of Stan's staid characters goes bonkers, he outdoes a regularly-manic character by the contrast), and the Assemblers have to recover the doctor from an alien race living on Earth to effect a last-minute save. The Wasp survives, natch, and Stan's description of the heroes' tear-filled gratitude tends to remain with one over the years. An offbeat *Avengers* story that really worked.

That's my Big 10, but just so nobody goes away mad, we'll give you the 10 runners-up:

1. *Avengers* #32-33: the first Sons of the Serpents story.
2. *Avengers* #73-74: the second Sons of the Serpents story.
3. *Avengers* #15: the death of Zemo.
4. *Avengers* #64: the death of Hawkeye's brother and the revelation of Clint Barton's true name.
5. *Avengers* #228-230: the trial of Henry Pym.
6. *Avengers Annual* #15/*West Coast Avengers Annual* #1: Quicksilver vs. the Avengers.
7. *Avengers* #8: the first appearance of Kang.
8. *Avengers* #9: the first Wonder Man story.
9. *Avengers* #141-144, 147-151: the Avengers fight Rogue and the Squadron Supreme, and meet Marvel's Western heroes.
10. *Avengers* #56: Captain America and Bucky's fateful World War II battle with Zemo. ●

A WINNING COMBINATION

The Champions Meet the Southern Knights

Preview by Darwin McPherson

Flash back to the late 1980's. The comics industry was thriving as a wave of new and interesting companies and titles hit the direct market.

One of the better books in those days was the critically acclaimed *Southern Knights*, published by Fictioneer Books, better known as the Comics Interview Group. Starring five super-heroes based in Atlanta, the Knights weren't your typical marvel/DC style super-team. Created by Henry and Audrey Vogel with David Willis, the Knights didn't necessarily have secret identities, wear costumes or have other conventional super-hero habits. They thrived for a while, numbering more issues during their run than most black and whites would ever see. But the post-glut market wouldn't support even the quality independents anymore, so the *Southern Knights* just faded into the realm of seemingly endless hiatus.

Also on the stands in those days were the *Champions*, one of the few color independent super-hero titles. Published by Hero Comics, the *Champions* disappeared in the middle of a major storyline. A couple of years later, they returned under the new title *League of Champions* and the story finished with production and distribution help from Innovation.

A few years ago, Hero publisher Dennis mallonee, *Southern Knights* co-creator Henry Vogel, and *Comics Interview* publisher David Anthony Kraft discussed the possibility of doing something together. "It seemed, after discussions, that the Champions and the Southern Knights might actually be living in universes that were somewhat compatible," Mallonee concluded. However, the cessation of both titles put the crossover on the back burner.

With Hero Graphics back in business, the idea of getting the Champions and the Southern Knights together returned as well. A six-issue crossover was planned, going between *Flare*, *League of Champions* and *Southern Knights*. To increase the attention this get-together would attract, Mallonee approached George Perez to handle the art. Perez, well known for drawing large crossovers, was a little tired. "After working as hard as I had been for the last couple of years on various projects over at DC and at Marvel," Perez said, "I told him I really wasn't in the market for a regular series.

"But I told him I was trying to line up some inking work because I wanted to do a bit of that. It's a nice technical job and doesn't require the same 'blank page creativity' that either pencilling or writing requires; it doesn't require the same personal involvement." Dennis and George then decided that George would provide finished art over six different pencillers. This, Perez realized, "would be a good way of honing my craft a bit more and not geting bored with the project in mid-stride. Because, after I do the first issue, I've got a brand new person to adjust to."

The artists assigned to each issue are as follows: #1) frequent Hero contributor Howard Simpson; #2) Lou Manna; #3) Howard Bender; #4) Scott Clark; #5 *Star Trek*'s Gordon Purcell (with a possible assist from Paul Abrams); #6) regular *Flare* artist Mark Propst. Using style guides and previous issues provided by Comics Interview and Hero, Perez must find "common ground" to keep all of the issues consistent. Having received art for issues #1 and, strangely enough, #4 when he was interviewed for this article, Perez already spotted "some costume discrepancies."

In addition, Perez was concerned about dealing with the varying experience levels. "Because many of the artists are so new, if I have to correct the person to the degree that it's too much work, then I start losing enjoyment. I didn't want the books to be jeopardized by *my* getting tired, because once I'm no longer inking and totally re-drawing, I might as well have been pencilling the book."

However, because Perez is officially there to "finish" the art, he's been given "a little more license to do some actual drawing." His goal is to make corrections when necessary and to help with the artist's weak points without losing them in the bargain. "I know what it was like when you go in and you're working with an inker you respect. In my case, when I started working with Joe sinnott on the *Fantastic Four*, I was hoping the inker would not try to change my work too much in order to give it the 'right' look. Like in the case of the *Fantastic Four*, that very distinct Kirby/Buscema look that was very prominent at the time.

"Yet when I saw Joe Sinnott inking me, I thought, 'Wow! He really captured my work in there and gave it the polish that it needed,' not realizing that he had made subtle changes that I couldn't see with the naked eye. I assumed that all he did was make my work better, as opposed to changing what needed to be changed in order to make the *entire* work better."

As of this writing, Perez had completed half of the first issue, but hadn't touched the fourth. The other issues were in the pencilling stages at the time of this writing. The story had been so thoroughly planned out that it was possible to work on the fourth issue before the second and third were complete. "I know how hard it is in a crossover when it is run by a big company," Perez stated. "I can imagine when it's being balanced by... basically Dennis [*laughs*]. He's got a lot of work on his hands with a project like this."

Hero Graphics is handling the editorial and production work for the crossover, while Comics Interview does the advertising and promotion. Mallonee and Vogel worked out the crossover's basic plot together, and each is responsible for most of a particular issue. Mallonee said Vogel "May end up doing some of the actual scripting, although at this point we think it might be better just to have one person do it all. He's provided much of the dialogue implicit in the plotwork he's done for most of the series."

What It's All About

The plot of the crossover is centered around an enemy of the Southern Knights, the sorceress Morrigan, who fancies herself a goddess. Vogel says she has "considerable power, but is not actually what you would consider a goddess. There is an instrument, a time travel machine, that she can use to augment her power. She could use it to bring forth worshippers, without which any good deity would have no power whatsoever. She has been after this thing since issue #15 of the *Southern Knights*, but at this point, she has not actually succeeded in having it for a long time." Her problem now is that she doesn't know where

THIS IS GETTING WEIRDER AND WEIRDER!
WE DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE. WE DON'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU.
YOU EXPECT US TO BELIEVE THAT?
LET'S SHOW THEM WHAT THEY'RE UP AGAINST.
HERE'S ATTARACK!
THIS BUSINESS IS HARD ENOUGH WITHOUT HAVING NEW COMPETITION POP UP OUT OF NOWHERE!
THIS IS INSANE!
RIGHT YOU SAID YOU WERE FIGURING IT OUT!
24

Pencils by Scott Clark from chapter #4.

it is.

"Since her efforts to locate it have failed," adds Mallonee, "she goes to one of the *Flare* villains, the crimelord of Los Angeles who's called in the press, "The Invincible Thugmaster." Mallonee says the Thugmaster "is not an evil character as such; he's more the amoral type," dealing in various services for a price. "The only reason he was willing to provide her with that information was because he thought that she was essentially powerless. He quickly learns his mistake in the first part of the story, and sets about trying to figure out how to stop Morrigan."

"Since he sells information," Vogel explained, "he calls up the Champions and offers to sell the information to them that she is going to be going after the Southen Knights." Then, according to Mallonee, "he puts together a group of super-powered people to find out how good the Southen Knights are. He goes down to Atlanta himself to check them out. He also foists an incompetent supervillain on Morrigan in an effort to hinder her."

Meanwhile, Vogel told, "the Champions, after trying to warn the Southern Knights through the phone—they keep getting the answering machine—fly to Atlanta in the hopes of getting there in time to warn the Southern Knights. They reach there about the same time Morrigan, and we have a nice long fight scene in the front lawn." And that's just the first part.

Actually, the first issue, *League of Champions #5*, presents Part One from the Champions' point of view. The second, *Southern Knights #35*, shows the Knights' side.

The next part of the crossover details what happens when the time machine is activated at some point during the fight. Mallonee explained, "The Champions and the Southern Knights end up scattered into three different time periods which are essentially alternate dimensions." In *Flare #8*, Flare, Icicle, and the Knights' Dragon go back to 18th century Atlanta. Coincidentally, this locale is the original stomping ground of the Knights' Aramis.

Elsewhere, in *League of Champions #6*, Electrode and Connie Ronnin of the Knights and Icestar end up in what Vogel described as "a contemporary time zone, but not like one they've ever seen before. It's Atlanta, but Atlanta in a country, in a world, that basically is a functioning anarchy." This dimension is "strongly libertarian, " Vogel explained, with laws only against intentionally harming other people. You can't rob them, but on the other hand, if you want to buy drugs on the corner and do drugs, that's your business."

Southern Knights #36 presents Knights Kristin Austin and Aramis and the Marksman in a 21st century Atlanta that Mallonee says will be "very familiar to people who followed *Eternity Smith*." While Smith himself doesn't appear, "we'll see several members of *Eternity Smith*'s supporting cast. Mallonee continued, "This is going to be the first glimpse that people will ever have had of that world that [Smith] spent ten years visiting. You'll get to see his daughter, Skylark Smith, when she's much older. You'll also get to see a woman who may or may not be a descendant of Flare, and is actually prominent in the background of *Eternity Smith*. It's only been mentioned a couple of times; her name is Sabrin Martel."

"The only hero not jumping across time and space is the Champion Rose. Thus, it falls upon her to save the others. And finally, in the double-sized *Flare #9*, there's the novel-length final confrontation with Morrigan. Actually, both *Flare*'s are double-sized, but issue #8 will feature a non-crossover related back-up or two.

"Crossovers, by their very nature, are very dangerous," Perez said. "Lord knows I've been involved with enough of them. Even the successful ones like *Secret Wars* or *Crisis on Infinite Earths* have had their share of monumental headaches." One way Mallonee is avoiding such "headaches" is by not having a core title like *War of the Gods* or *Infinity Gauntlet*. "We wanted to be able to just tell the story and not get in a situation where we're doing 'red skies' issues." That last comment refers to the tendency of some *Crisis*-crossovers to have a red sky in the background, indicating that the Crisis was going on, though it had no bearing on the issue's plot.

Cast of Characters

George Perez's name will probably help attract some new readers to the adventures to these two super-teams. For their sake, the following is a brief introduction to the characters.

Of the Champions, Flare is "Easily the most popular," according to Mallonee. "Flare is a fashion model who doubles as a costumed hero. She is much younger than she looks. At this point, she's about 17 years old, though she looks to be in her mid-20s. She has photonic, photo-kinetic powers that absorb light and re-emit it as kinetic energy, and she can fly. She has a kind of agressive personality that lends itself well to storytelling."

Mallonee calls the Marksman "The *real* leader of the team, even though, at this point, he doesn't have the title of Chairman. he's really the driving force behind the Champions. He's the one who brought the heroes together, keeps them together, keeps them focused." The Marksman is highly knowledgeable both about weapons and fighting techniques. In his secret identity, he runs his father's electronics company.

"Icestar and Icicle are brother and sister," Mallonee said. "They have similar powers, but not quite the same. Icestar has an elemental kind of ability, can control cold and water, so he makes ice. Icicle's power, Mallonee says, has a "broader range of command" than Icestar's. She can reach higher-end temperatures and can generate heat and steam, "but that's something she likes to keep secret. She's also a kleptomaniac. She's a liar and a thief who's trying to be a superhero because she wants her big brother to be proud of her."

According to Mallonee, "Rose is sort of an anomaly in the Champions because she doesn't do this sort of thing at all. She's not a super-hero; she's more like an occult detective/psychic investigator." However, she does possess some mystic power. An interesting link between the Champions and the Southern Knights causes Rose to involve herself in this adventure. Her family and Morrigan are great enemies, so Rose insists on taking part.

The leader of the Southern Knights is Electrode, described by Mallonee as "the only real super-hero in that group." More than the others, he follows some—though not all—of the settled conventions of the super-hero. Vogel explained, "He doesn't have a secret identity. Everybody in Atlanta knows that Electrode is really David Shenk, but he puts on a costume and does the super-hero bit." A serious comic book fan and "resident genius" of the group, Electrode "created a machine that gave him the powers he has," Vogel told. Basically, he fires electrical bolts and flies.

Dragon is a dragon. "There's no other description for him," Vogel said. "He's about forty feet long. . . green . . . flies. He's been around about three thousand years. He's one of the very few dragons that survived to this day. "He can transform between a human guise and his actual dragonic form." When he's not fire-breathing and doing dragon stuff, he lives amongst humans as Mark Dagon. Relevant to the crossover: In the latter days of the *Southern Knights*, Dragon swore that "the next time he saw Morrigan, he was going to destroy her," Vogel said.

Connie Ronnin is an Olympic caliber fencer who wields a psychic sword. Vogel explained, "She's got a lot of psychic powers, but they all manifest themselves through the sword. She can form telekinesis; that is, if somebody throws a knife at her, she can knock it aside. But only with the sword, that's as far as her mental powers would work. If she hits somebody with the sword, she'd make them feel that they'd been hit by a real weapon. She can't kill anybody with the sword, but it's possible that someday she may develop enough power to do something like that." But Vogel notes that killing anyone is something Connie wouldn't want to do.

"Kristin Austin is the strongest member of the group. In comic book terms, I guess she's a mutant. She was born like normal and just happened to become considerably stronger as she grew up. She's stronger than Dragon is, but not nearly as experienced. That's basically her entire power; She's very strong and bullet proof." She is "very outgoing, ruled by her emotions. She is the one most likely to get really pissed off and jump head first into something."

Finally, there's Aramis Merrow, the newest member of the Southern Knights. Vogel said he "is a sorcerer who was actually born in the 18th century, but was preserved in a spell for about 250 years. He was finally removed from the spell by the Knights by accident." He'd been in the supporting cast for a while, but as he became more accustomed to the 20th century, Aramis became a full-fledged member. Despite being so long-lived, he's only about 17 years old in actual physical and mental age. Mallonee pointed out that in the previous time machine storyline, it was revealed that "Aramis had a hand in several of the origin sequences for the other Southern Knights. So Aramis is, to some extent, the focal point, the creator, of the Southern Knights."

In addition to bringing the two super-teams together, the three primary creators have other specific goals that they hope this crossover will accomplish. Perez says he keeps reinventing himself to prove to the "young turks" that are "hot" today that he's still a force to be reckoned with.

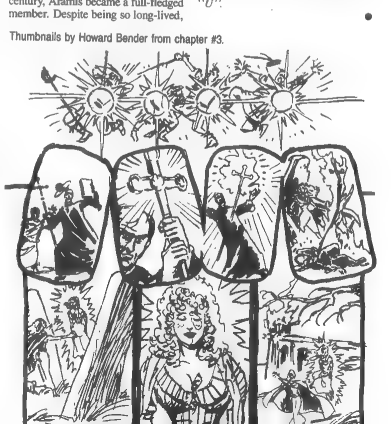
Hero's market research has shown that their comics reach barely 25% of their potential readers. Mallonee hopes Perez's name will encourage retailers who haven't been carrying *Champions* and other titles to do so.

And of course, if the six-issue series does well, it could herald the return of regular adventures for the Southern Knights. In addition to sales response, Vogel and the Comics Interview Group are looking for comments from fans. "If it looks good," Vogel said, "then we'll bring 'em back."

Featuring covers and finishes by George Perez. the Morrigan Wars storyline is tentatively scheduled to start in July. Continuing on for the next two months, each of the six color comics will be released two weeks apart.

They've already got Southern Knights, Champions, a Couple of writers, an *Evil* Sorceress, *Six* pencillers and a *Superstar* of finishes. Now all they need to spell success is "*U*".

Thumbnails by Howard Bender from chapter #3.



THE ANTELOPE, PLEASE

Hi there.

Thanks to publisher's lag time and the special column in #200, the **Second Annual Silver Gallstone Awards** (our list of the notable and embarrassing for the year 1991) doesn't appear until almost one half of the way through 1992. But we've got a lot of them, so let's just get on with it, shall we?

THE ADDY AWARDS FOR REMARKABLE WORKS of the Year is, as always, *not* a Ten Best list, because I don't pretend to read everything published in this medium. I must have missed any number of masterpieces, since I sure as hell didn't see many. And, as I said last year, some of the stuff respected folks say I should like just leaves me fish-eyed and confused.

But here's an incomplete roll call of some of the stuff I especially liked: *Love & Rockets*, *Hate*, *Dirty Plotte*, *Lowlife*, *American Splendor*, *Yummy Fur*, *Sandman*, *Beautiful Stories for Ugly Children*, *Hellblazer*, *Miracleman*, *Groo*, *Naughty Bits*, *Unsupervised Existence*, *Real War Stories*, *Eye of Mongomobo*, *Raw Volume II #3*, *Maus II*, *The Simpsons*, the syndicated strips *Doonesbury*, *Bizarro*, *Washingtoon*, *Calvin and Hobbes*, and *For Better or Worse*, and, just to certify that I'm not merely sucking up to the Fantagraphics party line here, Dan Chichester's *Daredevil* and Gerard Jones' *Green Lantern*, hardly cutting edge, but likeably goofy anyway. Again, this is a list typed off the top of the head, and by the time you read this, I'll probably be smacking myself about all the stuff I left out.

THE "SONNY BONO TELL-ALL AUTOBIOGRAPHY" MEDAL For Event We Simply Couldn't Care Less About was a close call. It almost went to the *Rocketeer* movie, which was so highly unmemorable in every respect that I didn't dare take a bathroom break halfway through, lest I find myself forced to ask the usher at the multiplex if he remembered which film I'd just come out of.

ALL ART BY CHAS GILLEN

But the dishonor goes to *Jihad*, the Epic Comics painted bookshelf format miniseries pitting the Cenobite-Demons from *Hellraiser* against Clive Barker's other gang of nasties, the *Nightbreed*.

Now, I'm honestly sorry about that. I idolize Clive Barker, for the most part: I envy his skill with the English language, and I admire his success (in print, at least) at ensuring that his gut-wrenchingly violent horror stories are usually *about* something deeper than just reducing human beings to spin-art. That said, I also find him a cold and leaden movie director, with an interesting visual flair but absolutely no heart . . .only slightly better than Stephen King turned out to be, a few years back, when he made the terrible *Maximum Overdrive*.

It's worth noting here that, just as King's godawful flick came from a decent short story called "Trucks," Barker's were derived from a pair of superior novellas called "Cabal" and "The Hellbound Heart." I have no qualms about directing you to those original sources. But since the comics are based on the bloated and gamey movies, the concept of Cenobites Versus Nightbreed leaves me with a colossal feeling of. . . Ahhhhhh, Who Cares?

THE MICHAEL KEATON'S CHIN AWARD for Biggest Tempest in Smallest Teapot goes to the Pee-Wee Herman affair, which seemed to bring out the sanctimonious idiocy of an entire country. One of the low points: Disney World righteously removing a short film starring Pee-Wee from one of its attractions . . .while still retaining the outdated Exxon film which mentions the scenic beauty of Valdez, Alaska. This is as succinct a review of America's moral priorities as any you're likely to find.

THE ZSA ZSA GABOR TROPHY for Character or Characters That Remain Popular For No Readily Apparent Reason goes to . . .the Predators, which have helped turn Dark Horse publishing from a creative little independent to the success story of the industry. At this point, they look like they actually stand a chance of carving themselves a serious slice of the Marvel/DC pie.

Inevitably, the company has also lost some of its innovative soul in the process, but they've surprisingly held on to quite a bit, so let's not fault them for that.

Instead, we should fault ourselves for going gaga over the stupidest, most pointless concept in the Dark Horse stable of licensed characters. Because, not to put too fine a point on it, ladies and gents. . .

. . .the Predators are boring.

Even in the Schwarzenegger movie that spawned them—a fair-to-middling entertainment, but no modern classic—it was clear that almost no thought had gone into their creation. They have only two shticks, really: they turn invisible and they hunt people. That's it. There ain't no more. Everything else is just gunfire and explosions and machismo and people yelling "Aaaarrrggghh."

If you want to see how anemic the Predator concept is, check out David Gerrold's kickass series of SF adventure novels, group-titled *The War Against the Chtorr*. Gerrold posits the invasion of a fully realized alien ecosystem, from micro-organisms on up. The dangers posed by the Chtorrans come in so many forms, including some wholly unpredictable, that the giant carnivorous worms which represent the most visible part of Gerrold's invasion force actually comprise only the smallest part of the threat. Now *those* are some interesting killer aliens. They haven't begun to exhaust their tricks. And they could eat the woose Predators for breakfast.

THE RILLY HEP CATS AWARD for Pathetic Stab at Trendiness goes to Archie Comics, whose recent redesign of Jughead as a mohawked skateboarder finally updates the character to the '70s. Rad. We can hardly wait for the rap version of "Sugar, Sugar."

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE AWARD for Product Geared to Fans Who Can Be Bamboozled Into Buying Anything went, last year, to Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man*. Do I really have to tell you which overhyped, mylar-bagged mutant monstrosity got it this year?

THE DAVID NIVEN MEMORIAL AWARD for Mindbogglingly Blase Responses to Potentially Disastrous Situations took place in a book I don't ordinarily read; it had to be pointed out to me by an aghast clerk at my comic shop. The place was *Superman: Man of Steel #6*, written by Louise Simonson. The character was Lois Lane, who, upon finding out that Superman was missing and suffering from amnesia, commented, "Could be worse." Now, granted that the lady must be a mite jaded after all these years of mad scientists and giant gorillas. . .but even *discounting* the fact that she's supposed to be engaged to the big lug and should be a little more emotional about his plight, the news that Kal-El no longer knows what side he's supposed to be on would certainly leave *me* wondering if I was paid up on my life insurance premiums. What about you?

THE SECOND ANNUAL BOB HANEY AWARD for Most Ridiculous Plot Twist goes, for the second time, to a storyline featuring The Joker—this time in the first issue of the *Robin II: The Joker's Wild* mini-series, scripted by Chuck Dixon, in which the homicidal Clown Prince of Crime escapes from Arkham Asylum for the twentieth time this year. Well, all right, I'm willing to accept that much. But how does The Joker manage it this time?

Well, he has a male confederate smuggle in a smoke bomb by putting on a little old lady outfit and pretending to be his sainted mother coming for an innocent little visit.

The stupidity of this development should go without saying, but given the sales of this multiple-cover collector's item, let's belabor the point anyway. Belaboring the point is fun.

As I said last year, the Joker, as currently conceived, is one of the most prolific mass murderers in the history of pop culture. He leaves a trail of bodies behind him wherever he goes, and no prison can hold him. And yet, we're expected to believe that the penal authorities will let this "woman" see him just because she claims to be his mother, and comes with a lawyer making high-handed threats. Oh yes, it's true that Arkham's director suspects a trap from the very beginning—but if he's so dad-blasted intelligent, how come Mr. Harvard Smarty-Pants doesn't require her to *prove* she's the Joker's mother? How come he doesn't ask her for birth records, or pictures of her murderous tyke as a child? How come he doesn't even make her tell him what the Joker's real name is?

And, given his heroic certainty that this is all just a ruse, how come his self-righteous determination that this mysterious woman sees her son "only under *my* conditions" only translates to a paltry roomful of guards and a metal detector?

Yes, I know super-hero comics are allowed to play fast and loose with logic. That's part of their charm. But let's be real here. This scene goes beyond the comfortably illogical, past the realm of the downright stupid, and into the abyss of the buttheadedly *wrong*. Because even with F. Lee Bailey, William Kuntsler, Alan Dershowitz, Wolff and Byrd, and the ghost of Clarence Darrow as attorneys, no thug dressed as an old lady and claiming to be a notorious inmate's long-lost mother would be able to get past even the first checkpoint of the most incompetently run prison in the world. Chances are he couldn't even break into a county lockup that way. Not even (hard as this might be to believe) in Alabama.

And *especially* not if the prisoner in question is Charles Manson Cubed.

Penal authorities—HA! In the DC Universe, Penile Authorities is more like it. . . .

THE SMELLOVISION AWARD for Year's Silliest Marketing Gimmick goes to the recent spate of Glow-In-The-Dark covers. This must be awfully convenient for those of us who do all our comics reading in coal mines.

THE SECOND ANNUAL DOCTOR GOODIE AND THE OUTSIDERS AWARD for Year's Most Appalling Premise almost went to *The Oz Squad*, in which Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Lion, and the Tin Woodsman are obsessed angst-ridden super-heroes. The only reasons it didn't win is A) that the concept does have a certain perverse appeal, much as we might hate to admit it. . .and B) the creators did obviously know just what kind of bad taste they were revelling in.

No, in the end, the trophy in this category went to Marvel's *NFL Superpro*, which is about a former professional football player who fights crime dressed as a. . .professional football player. Aiieee, as my friend Jenny would say. Forget the fact that this concept reeks of the even more embarrassing *Kickers, Inc.* Forget that with this title on the stands the ignoble science of licensing has now officially struck rock bottom. Instead, boggle your mind with the titles the stories would have sported if Marvel has published this thing during the Lee/Kirby era: "This Touchdown—This Tragedy!;" "Half-time to Terror!" and, of course, "When Tight Ends Clash!"

Oh well. The award for **BEST GENRE-RELATED DRAMATIC PRESENTATION** goes, by default, to *The Simpsons*; I say by default because *The Addams Family* movie wasn't as good as it should have been, and I wasn't at the San Diego Comic-Con to see the *American Splendor* play everybody says was so terrific. It probably was. But I didn't see it. Still, honoring the best-written show on TV ain't exactly an occasion for guilt either. . .and *The Simpsons* is frequently just that. So it wins for the second year running. Sue me.

THE WORST GENRE-RELATED DRAMATIC PRESENTATION almost became a gag presentation to Saddam Hussein, because it wasn't until the end of the year that something irritated me enough to qualify. But then came Steven Spielberg's bloated, maudlin, overproduced *Hook*, which left me saddened and aghast. No blame accrues to any of the cast members: Robin Williams, Dustin Hoffman, Julia Roberts, Bob Hoskins and (especially) Maggie Smith all inhabited their roles perfectly, and they all lit up the screen whenever the cluttered script permitted them to exercise their considerable charm. But the once awesome Spielberg seems to have based his directing job on just how blatantly he can milk the false emotional climaxes that, but the movie's end, seem to be coming every fifteen seconds or so.

To be fair, there are a few wonderfully charming moments in *Hook*; even some scattered brilliant ones. In a better movie, they'd shine like pearls. But then, just because Spielberg seems incapable of making a movie *totally* devoid of interest, that doesn't mean he can't come awfully close. . .and, just as the occasional inspired moment in his previous flop *1941* made all the stupidity surrounding it seem worse, the magical moments in *Hook* make the surrounding failure look positively dismal.

The most succinct review of the film was actually provided by a little girl who sat across the row from me. For close to two hours she kept asking her parents where Peter Pan was. Near the end of the film, *after* Williams's selfish yuppie completes his transformation into some approximation of J.M. Barrie's character, the little girl actually began crying that she wanted to go home, because although Williams was dressed like Peter Pan, and was acting like Peter Pan, and was being treated by everybody on screen as if he was some unholy Christ-allegory version of Peter Pan, she sure as hell wasn't *seeing* Peter Pan.

Frankly, I think Siskel and Ebert oughta take this kid on as a partner. She's sharp.

THE "EEE-YEWWW" AWARD for Most Ignoble Debut by Previously Unpublished Cartoonist goes to Adam-Troy Castro, for "Infernal Gall: The Comic Strip," in *AH* #194. Let's face it, the dude can't even draw hands.

THE FIRST ANNUAL DANNY DeANGELO MEMORIAL AWARD for Letter Column Regular Whose Byline Always Makes us Cringe Like Elementary School Girls Getting Their First Glimpse of Three-Day-Old Roadkill does not—repeat not—go to Kevin Mathews of the Republic of Singapore. I'm not that petty.

Besides, annoying as that fellow can be, in this quarter, he was left far behind by David Malcom Porta of Sacramento, California, who specializes in sending virulently bigoted and self-righteously "Christian" rants to every mainstream comic which runs a storyline that dares to suggest, no matter how mildly, that gay people and/or AIDS patients deserve some even minimal level of consideration as human beings. Porta's bile, which often comes complete with insulting slurs, has polluted the pages of *Jonny Quest*, *Zot!*, and *The Flash*, among other comics, for years, and the foul taste it leaves in the mouth would defy a toothbrush dipped in liquid nitrogen.

Incidentally, if Porta's reading this, and wants to assume that I'm what he would term a "homo," he can go right ahead. For the purpose of this discussion, whether I am or not simply doesn't matter. Because whatever their true religion might actually be, righteous men confronted by Nazis should always loudly and repeatedly declare themselves Jewish.

A SNIDE COMMENT ABOUT THE MOVIE *NAKED LUNCH*.

I don't have to go to a David Cronenberg movie to see a talking asshole. I can just have lunch with the boss. [*Thanks a lot—TH*]

A Quickie Recommendation Totally Unrelated to Comics

The bestselling novel *Jurassic Park*, by Michael Crichton (Ballantine, $5.99). All about an amusement park of the near future where genetically reconstructed dinosaurs romp around in fenced-in compounds for the edification of tourists. It won't surprise anybody reading that synopsis that the dinos eventually get loose and start chowing down on park visitors—and the book does present more than its fair share of edge-of-the-seat thrills—but that's ultimately not why I'm recommending it.

No, I wish to cite the two cute kids who are fleeing from prehistoric beasties from about page 180 on. The little boy is brave, intelligent, resourceful, tremendously likeable, and, of course, wholly unappreciated. The little girl is one of the stupidest, whiningest, most self-centered, airheaded, and annoying kids ever imagined. Six pages after she first appears you'll already be rooting for the dinosaurs to eat her. By the end of the book, the other characters are telling her to shut up every time she opens her mouth.

There's something perversely appealing about this. And it ain't just sexism, since the book also features an adult heroine who proves to be one of the most courageous characters in the book. Just call the little girl a fine antidote to Hollywood's gallery of impossibly heroic kids. And lay ten-to-one odds that the wonderful, unredeemable awfulness of her character will *not* survive the book's current adaptation by the Spielberg mafia.

Be brave. We're near the end now. Special thanks to Elena Andrews, Sharon Gumerove, Donna Ellis, and Jennifer Grey (not, as she keeps reminding everybody, the dirty dancing actress). Congrats to Hy Bender on the second edition of his essential reference work, *PC Tools: The complete Reference*. As always, this column welcomes comments and criticism at P.O. Box 461, Hartsdale, NY 10530-0461. I don't promise (or rule out) personal replies, but I will try to respond to most intelligible correspondence in the pages of an upcoming installment. As always, letters about anything else in the magazine should be sent to "Amazing Readers."

Incidentally, you'll notice I haven't gotten involved in the Teri Wood/Dave Strom feud. That's not out of high-principled neutrality; you should know by now that I ain't exactly Switzerland. It's just that when they finally take each other out in a fire-storm straight out of a James Cameron movie, all of this will be *mine*!

Next Month

The complete hero history of one of the most popular characters to come out of the Golden Age—star of comic books, movie serials, TV shows, big-budget '90s cinema, and his own talk show, the one super-hero revered above all others by the French. . .the Unbeatable *Anvil Man!* Plus Notary Sojak—The Explanation! And, if we have room, even more lint from the Shroud of Turin! See you then! ●

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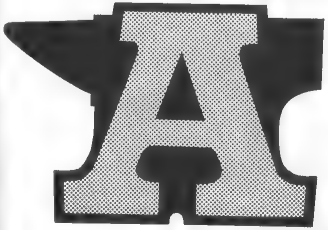

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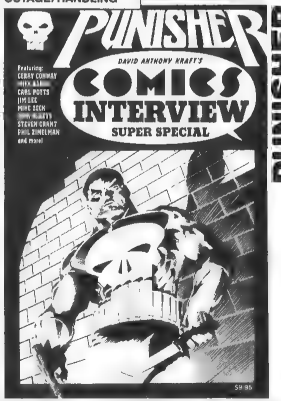

"Comics Interview Super Specials, Punisher, Batman, X-Men and — the piece de resistance — Masters of Marvel. I'd rate all of these as don't-miss items, particularly the last named. Grade: A." — *Don Thompson, COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE*

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ANDY MANGELS BACK STAGE

THE BAT IS BACK

Having just been given word a few days ago that not only would this column end in three issues, but that *Amazing Heroes* itself would end as well, I'm rather in shock. I've been writing for this magazine for so long that it's become a part of my life. It'll be hard to say good-bye. I am negotiating to continue this news column elsewhere, though, so keep an eye out.

FOX

Those with a quick eye caught the one-time appearance of *Two-Fisted Tales* on Fox on January 18th at 9 pm, after much waffling over when the show would air. Despite the fact that it's produced by the same guys behind the award-winning *Tales From the Crypt*, the pilot received no attention and went down with the ship. Unfortunately, so did my VCR during the taping of it. Any eagle-eyed readers have a complete copy of *Two-Fisted Tales*? Write me at the address at the end of the column.

In February, Fox got the jump on everyone by announcing its Fall kids' schedule, including *Batman: The Animated Series*, its 4:30 P.M. show from Warner. Sixty-five episodes will be produced of this Art Deco show. *Batman* has been reviewed by a marketing firm as "dark creepy, and rather violent." Ex-Marvel-president-now-Fox-Children's President Margaret Loesch admitted the show has "some scary parts." Keep watching this column for more news.

Airing on Saturdays at 10:00 A.M. is *X-Men*, with 13 episodes from Saban Entertainment and Marvel! At press time, it is unknown exactly which characters would be used in the series. Darrell McNeil, my counterpart over at *Comics Buyers Guide*, will be doing story boards for the series! Congratulations, Darrell.

Fox has several other series on the development boards, including *Animaniacs*, another Spielberg property for Fall 1993. Also up for potential series are *Dinosaur Planet*, *Dinosaurs for Hire* (I don't know if this is based on the Eternity comic series), and a skit show called *National Lampoon's High School*. *Wishkid*, the NBC series that stars the voice of Macaulay Culkin, is being redeveloped as a Fox series as well.

ABC

The Human Target is still without a premiere date. The seven shows have been completely finished, and Pet Fly says they look great. What's strange is that they'll get word of a next season pick-up in early May (if it's picked up), and the series may not have even premiered by then! Rick Springfield stars as DC's Christopher Chance.

CBS

Family Dog, the Tim Burton-Steven Spielberg project, is still being reworked by the Canadian Nelvana animation studio. CBS promises that "it will be on sometime in this century." The boring animation by Taiwanese firms caused one CBS executive to tell *Variety* that, "We shouldn't have sent this assignment to people who view the dog as cuisine and not as a pet." The loss of revenue on the 13 episodes which were to have been aired last spring adds up to $10 million for CBS and Amblin!

The Fabulous Funnies; *The First Hundred Years* will be a one-hour

Early sketches from *Batman: The Animated Series.*

documentary on the history of comic strips for CBS in the 92-93 season. It will be produced by Lee Mendelsohn Productions, who are also working with Bill Melendez and Charles Schulz on another *Charlie Brown Special* to air this spring.

Any rumors you've heard about a *Flash* reunion movie are still *not true*, according to Pet Fly. But, if you missed it, the pilot film will be released in the U.S. on video later this year. Other episodes may follow.

Syndication & Cable

Swamp Thing is spacing its new episodes out for the time being, with a three months-on, three months-off schedule. New shows air in June.

If you hadn't heard by now, Paramount's rushed forward a new *Star Trek* spin-off just days after Gene Roddenberry's death. (Hmmm, wonder if there's a connection?) *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* is a new syndicated series to debut January 1993, most likely on the same stations that carry *Star Trek: The Next Generation* This series will take place the same time as *ST:TNG*, sharing some of the same characters. The Starfleet officers take command of a remote space station situated near a newly discovered wormhole (a shortcut through space) that has become one of the most strategic locations in the galaxy. Popular crew members O'Brien (Colm Meany) and Ensign Ro (Michelle Forbes) are a definite part of the Nine, while Lwaxana Troi (Majel Barrett) seems a good possibility as well. Twenty episodes have been committed, with production beginning in June. Each episode has a budget of $1.5 million. Hollywood rumor has it that the stars are being signed for seven years of the show!

This Fall you'll be able to see six 30-minute animated specials of Lynn Johnston's tremendous comic strip *For Better Or For Worse*. This is one of the best daily strips in the country, and the six specials will air on the Disney Channel.

With Ted Turner's buyout of Hanna-Barbera last year, it seemed only a matter of time before Turner announced The Cartoon Network. Debuting October 1st, the 24-hour cable channel will probably be almost all Hanna-Barbera features. Maybe now we'll see those old *Fred and Barney Meet the Thing* cartoons (anybody have copies of these?), as well as the early *Fantastic Four* shows.

Another new syndicated cartoon series will be *Conan the Adventurer*, featuring the adventures of a "kinder and gentler" teenage Conan. What? This show's already in progress from Claster and Sunbow, for 13 episodes.

Superforce has the end of its second season in sight. Zach faces a weird alien named Iau in "King of the Trees" (May 2). Then, it's "The End of Everything Pt. I & II" (May 9 & 16) as synthetic humanoids gain control over material which could destroy the world. Zach survives to face the "Long Journey Home" (May 23) with the return of Iau, and finally rounds the season out at "A Hundred Years a Second" (May 30), in which Zach's memories must be reprogrammed by F.X.

Superboy wraps up its fourth and final season in May. Rowdy Roddy Piper is a health club owner/alchemist who must use young blood to keep his youth in "Metamorphosis" (May 2). The two-part series closer is "Rites of Passage Pt. I & II" (May 9 & 16). The show's cast travels to Smallville just in time for Clark to lose his powers, learn about his Kryptonian heritage, and possibly lose his secret identity!

HBO's *Tales From The Crypt* has started filming its fourth season of another 12 episodes, to start airing at the end of June. As usual, a trilogy/movie will start the season. Shows already shot include: "None But The Lonely Heart," directed by Tom Hanks and starring Treat Williams, Frances Sternhagen, Sugar Ray Leonard, and Henry Gibson; "The New Arrival," directed by Peter Medak and starring Twiggy, David Warner, and Zelda Rubinstein; and "Beauty Rest," directed by Stephen Hopkins and starring Buck Henry, Mimi Rogers, Cathy Ireland, and Jenifer Rubin (this was called "the babe episode"—I don't think they mean newborns); "This'll Kill Ya," directed by Robert Longo and starring Tom Skerrit and Sonia Braga; and "What's Cookin'?,"directed by Gil Adler and starring rock star Meatloaf. I think that's the answer to the title's question as well.

For Better Or For Worse animated specials are now in production.

Feature Films

The eagerly-awaited Edgar Rice Burroughs film, *The Princess of Mars*, may have to wait a bit longer. Director John McTiernan left the Cinergi/Disney project after the problems he faced with Disney on *Medicine Man*.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III is set to film later this year for a spring 1993 premiere. New Line Cinema will distribute. No other news yet. New Line is also filming a live-action version of another cartoon team, the *Toxic Crusaders*.

Blank Man is a new film to star Damon Wayans and Keenan Ivory Wayans. It sounds supsiciously like the super-hero movie the Wayans wanted to do two years ago. Brother Damon wants to direct. Gosh, maybe they can cast brother Marlon Wayans in the film as a sidekick, since he was cheated out of the role in *Batman Returns*.

Some premire dates to mark on your calendar: the lushly animated *Little Nemo in Slumberland* comes out on May 22nd, Ralph Bakshi's live action/animated *Cool World* on July 1st, Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* on August 14th, and TriStar's Dolph Lundgren vehicle *Universal Soldier* on July 17th.

Everybody who believes *Brenda Starr* will finally see the light of a projection screen this spring from Triumph may be kidding themselves, but that's what they're announcing. If you didn't know, the long-delayed film stars Brooke Shields and Timothy Dalton (before he became Bond). It was financed by money from the BCCI scandals.

Ready for the rumor-mill to start again? This time it's that in James Cameron's upcoming *Spider-Man* for Carolco, the roles have been cast. According to my source, Michael Beihn is to play Peter Parker/Spider-Man, Arnold Schwarzenegger is Doctor Octopus, and Jack Nicholson is the Green Goblin. Yeah, right. While Beihn might be a possibility, the others are pretty much dream-casting.

Meanwhile, Carolco's financial troubles have levelled off, but not without their losses. Oliver Stone has left his contract at Carolco, and is negotiating with Warner Brothers. Cameron may not be far behind: he has one picture left (possibly *Spider-Man*) on his Carolco contract, and less than a year to do it in. After that, he's looking to break off into his own autonomous production company, a la Lawrence Gordon's Largo Ent. Cameron's currently working on *The Crowded Room* for 20th Century-Fox No word on how this might affect the Cameron-produced *X-Men* project for Carolco.

Castle Communications' new film, *The Black Panther*, is not Marvel's character. It's about a serial killer. Don't get excited.

Michael Jacksons' super-hero film *MidKnight* is having more problems, and even Bubbles the Chimp can't help. With the suicide of designer Anton Furst, the visual work is rudderless, and Sony's reportedly not happy with the Caroline Thompson/Larry Wilson script which finds Jackson as a cyborg.

Apparently, it may not have been a publicity stunt. Jennifer Connelly and Bill Campbell (he's now starring in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*) announced their engagement when *The Rocketeer* was still in theaters. They're still together, and are talking of a wedding sometime in 1992.

A third remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is on its way, directed by Abel Ferrara, and written by *Amazing Heroes* fan Stuart Gordon. Cast members include Meg Tilly and a bunch of people I've never heard of, including Gabrielle Anwar, Terry Kinney, and Billy Wirth.

B-Man is an in-production film about a group of ethics researchers (what?) turned super-heroes. It's from Coho-Signal Communications, and will be directed by company president Tony Hubner and Bill Kirksey. Tim Kirkpatrick plays B-Man/Brent Brently, with his youthful black partner Bluebird/Robert Barnswallow, played by Robert Alexander. Jacinto Riddick is Robert's brother, Buster, while Janifer Dumas plays the nasty villainess Karen Kravin Koward, head of a leveraged buy-out firm.

B-Man started as a spoof on a certain popular super-hero, but soon became an original social satire/comedy. According to a company spokesperson, B-Man is "post-modern super-heroes waging a war against assholeness, greed, and self-centered '80s things." Expecting to be finished with the film by the end of summer, the company is looking for major theatrical release.

Ilya Salkind recently spoke about *Superman V* to a New York newspaper. He revealed that they were planning on going back to the beginning and starting from scratch, including the cast. Even Lois Lane won't be spared. Still, Salkind said, "We've been talking to Christopher Reeve, and it's possible he might reprise his role."

Aliens III opens on May 22nd, starring Sigourney Weaver. Because of the cancellation of *Amazing Heroes* and the reshuffling of some column topics, I won't be doing the script reviews of the four different *Aliens III* scripts here. Sorry.

Bernd Eichinger's Neue Constantin Films still has the *Fantastic Four* and *Silver Surfer* films in "active development," but doesn't see a start date for at least a year, possibly two. They've also recently started development on a live-action *Prince Valiant* movie.

Ridley Scott will direct the animated Moebius film, *Starwatcher*, for Odyssey Distributors. Scott worked with Moebius on *Bladerunner*, and his name virtually guarantees big-studio release of the film, which has already started production in France.

John Carpenter and his writer wife Sandy King are putting things into motion at Universal for their remake of the 1954 *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

Theater

Annie Warbucks, the re-tooled *Annie 2* play, is getting rave reviews in Chicago. Opening February 5th in Chicago, the play was greeted with poor anticipation due to the staggeringly bad *Annie 2: Miss Hannigan's Revenge* from two years ago. However, the critics and the public have responded well to the new version. If tomorrow continues to look good for the show, *Annie Warbucks* is expected to start a short national tour in August, for an antipated Broadway opening at Christmas.

True love triumphs in *The Rocketeer*. . . and off-screen.

The excitement isn't enough for Hollywood though. Columbia bigman Ray Stark was hurt when the studio turned down his proposal for a film of *Annie 2*, a pet project. The studio is perhaps waiting to see how the revised play performs.

Batman Returns

Surprise hit the fans when Warner unveiled the new *Batman Returns* trailer on *Entertainment Tonight* on Wednesday, February 19th. It quickly showed up on CNN's *Showbiz Today* segment (albeit with the credits running over the top of it), and opened as a movie trailer in theaters on February 21st, the same day the one-sheets were released.

Those one-sheets will be just in time, as Batman creator Bob Kane despises the teaser poster, citing its flat head and utter lack of impact.

Warner is denying reports that the film's budget is now over $75 million, saying that it's "only $50 million." If the former is true, I believe its price tag is topping every movie made except *Terminator 2*. Nevertheless, the film wrapped production February 20th, almost a month late.

Michelle Pfeiffer's pretty stunt-double (in Catwoman's costume for most of the action scenes) is a kick-

Sean Young as The Catwoman! Va-va-voom!

boxing and karate champion named Kathy Long.

Meanwhile, Sean Young still hasn't shut up about her thwarted desire for the role of Catwoman. After recent appearances on *Hard Copy, Dennis Miller, One on One with John Tesh*, and an interview in *Entertainment Weekly*, she hasn't said much more than I reported on last issue. I must admire her, however, for her guts in bucking the Hollywood system by telling the truth—having been in the heart of many a controversy in this medium. I just wish she spoke more eloquently about her grievances. Does anyone have the original *Joan Rivers* and *Entertainment Tonight* clips on video?

Okay, so this isn't technically movie news, but it is *Batman*. At the Australian Warner Brothers theme park, they'll be opening up a new top secret *Batman* project this summer. *The Batman Adventure* finds tourists being captured by the Penguin. It's up to the other tourists to help Batman and his sidekick, Oliver (Alfred's nephew), to help defeat the dirty bird. The three main characters appear on video only, shot by director Hoyt Yeatman on the sets of *Batman Returns* during the last days of filming. Though the real costumes and makeup for the characters are used, neither Keaton nor DeVito appears in the production. The lookalikes are very close, though. Remember, you read it here first! Make your vacation plans now!

Book Releases

Celebrity Skin #16, put out by *High Society*, has many features on nude scenes of super-hero and sci-fi women, including: Jennifer (*Rocketeer*) Connelly, Kim (*Batman*) Basinger, and Michelle (*Batman Returns*) Pfeiffer. It also features a "spread" on Sean Young, with several pictures of her as Catwoman, and another on Brigitte Nielsen which refers to "Brigitte's most recent film disaster, *She-Hulk*." Maybe they've seen something I haven't (publishers of magazines like this most likely have seen things I haven't), but perhaps they're jumping the. . .er. . .gun when it comes to the green giantess's screen debut. And to those who wonder what a true-blue queer like me is doing checking out the straight celebrity skin mags, it's to clue *you* into bizarro things like *this*. Sheesh!

Script Review

BATMAN RETURNS

5/20/91—Written by Dan Waters

In *AH* #199, I reviewed the script for *Batman II* as written by Sam Hamm. Tim Burton didn't like that script; instead he commissioned a script by Dan Waters (of *Heathers* fame), with later revisions by Wesley Strick (*Cape Fear*). This month, we'll take a look at that script, an inside look at the almost-finished-filming *Batman Returns*!

Security on this movie is tighter than any movie in recent history; still, I was able to read a copy of the script recently. The publicist told me certain elements have been removed; those are italicized. (All the sequences with the Kid have been removed, according to the publicists. So have the Punch and Juliet characters.)

SPOILER WARNING: *If you do not want to know the plot of* Batman Returns, *read no further!*

As the film opens, thirty years ago, a young woman give birth to a hideous mutant baby. Shunned by both parents (the father is Paul Reubens, a.k.a. Pee-Wee Herman, in a cameo role) and the older brother, the baby is eventually thrown over a bridge in a baby carriage. Miraculously, the carriage floats, taking the child to the Penguin enclosure of the Gotham Zoo. Surrounded by four statuesque Emporer Penguins, the child finds his new family.

As in Hamm's original script, it's just before Christmas (four days to Hamm's sixteen) in Gotham, and the most popoular gift items are Batman merchandise. From his sewer-home lair, the now-grown Penguin (Danny DeVito) has been leading a group of depraved carnival workers on a hit-and-run crime spree of Gotham. Even Batman (Michael Keaton, returning) hasn't been effective against the dirty bird. Now, at the lighting of the huge Christmas Tree in Gotham Plaza, Penguin plans a debilitating, monstrous assault against Gotham's revellers.

Max Schreck (Christopher Walken), one of Gotham's most powerful and beloved businessmen, is about to meet with the Mayor (Michael Murphy) regarding a new chemical plant. The Mayor is going to turn him down, which so enrages Max that he vows to get even. Here we meet Max's bodyguard Chip (Andrew Stevens), a dumb Thug, and his much sexually-harassed secretary, the mousy Selina Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer).

Max's tiff with the Mayor is about to be interrupted as Penguin's Red Triangle Circus Gang (so named because of the red triangles painted over their left eyes) charges into Gotham Plaza, razing the stores, robbing the citizens, and inspiring much terror (one of the gang is *Ghost*'s Vincent Schiavelli as the Organ Grinder). Batman shows up and makes short work out of many of the Gang, but is dispatched to the Schreck Building when the Ringmaster and several cronies attempt to kidnap Schreck and the Mayor. Batman saves them after a brief meeting with Selina Kyle.

The Penguin (Danny DeVito) and the Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer) in *Batman Returns*.

Cut to that evening when Selina goes home and we see her pathetic home life and dozens of cats. Forgetting an important file, she must return to the office. Unknown to her, Max and Chip have now been kidnapped by the Penguin. Schreck convinces him that Schreck can help him become Mayor of Gotham, and the two plan later set up a plan in Schreck's office. *With the help of Punch and Juliet, two over-the-top yuppies*, Schreck transforms Penguin into something nearing respectability, with a tux, a monocle, and the trademark umbrella. He also gives him a name: Oswald Cobblepot. The campaign is underway.

Unfortunately, Selina stumbles into the meeting, and is thrown out the window by Chip. Falling to her death, she is soon surrounded by hundreds of cats, who breathe into her mouth and bite her, apparently transferring some kind of feline life into her. She revives and heads home, destroying every bit of cuteness and warmth in her apartment and transforming it into a lair of depravity.

The next day, Penguin makes a staged save of the Mayor's baby, before announcing to the press that he's been maligned and is innocent of any crimes. Bruce Wayne meets with Max, saying he won't support the chemical plant either, and both men are startled when a very different Selina shows up for work. She immediately lets Max know she's keeping her mouth shut about her murder, and that she's taking some paid time off.

As Chip spies on her that night, she makes a black costume. *He comes to her apartment, only to die in a quicksand pit in the middle of her floor!* The Penguin and his cronies rob the Gotham Museum that night, among other stores. Batman shows up and confronts Penguin, even as Catwoman makes her first appearance on the roof, slashing several thugs before heading into a Schreck department store to blow it up.

Batman battles the Circus Gang in several places and eventually catches up with Catwoman. A rooftop battle ends with Batman hanging on for his life as Catwoman falls from the

building onto a truckful of kitty litter. The two go home to nurse their wounds, not the least of which are hearts pierced by Cupid's arrows.

Two days before Christmas, and Penguin steps up his campaign for mayor. When the Catwoman visits him in his underground lair, they decide to team up against Batman, even though Schreck has ordered Penguin to kill Catwoman. She suggests they utilize future crimes to implicate Batman and turn him into a criminal in the eyes of the city.

Later, Bruce meets Selina again and the attraction is immense. She goes back to his place for a heavy petting session. Both excuse themselves later when the "Relighting of the Tree" ceremony is to begin. Bruce heads out as Batman, not knowing he's already been set up by the Penguin. Catwoman shows up to help the Penguin with the kidnapped Ice Princess (whom Batman supposedly kidnapped), and she and Batman battle on the rooftops once again. Severely hurt and without his utility belt, Batman makes a hard glider-wing landing onto the streets below, into the arms of the angry Gotham citizens. As if things weren't bad enough, sinister things have happened to the Batmobile; Red Triangle techno-thugs have broken through its shields and sabotaged it.

As Batman escapes unknowingly into this damaged Batmobile, Penguin double-crosses Catwoman, killing her. She survives again, angry at Penguin and Max. Batman, trapped in the Batmobile, must watch in horror as it swerves throughout Gotham, running down innocent bystanders. Eventually he regains control *and smashes through into a garage, where a young black whiz-kid mechanic (Marlon Wayans, so far only named "The Kid") is working.*

The Kid helps Batman fix the Batmobile, then the two of them must leave, followed by the Penguin's thugs and the Gotham police. As they near an alley that's too small for the car, the sides shear off and it shifts into a Bat-Bullet, barely large enough for Batman *and the Kid*, but still roadworthy. *The Kid gets out later, giving Batman his card. As he wanders off, dazed, he wipes some grease off of an enigmatic "R" in a circle on his coveralls.*

It's Christmas Eve and, thanks to the Penguin's tactics, Batman's name is mud in Gotham. Bruce has evidence exposing Max Schreck as the money man behind the Penguin's campaign, and he and Selina both plan to be at the Annual Christmas Eve Maxquerade Ball Schreck is holding. When Max makes a deal with the Mayor, he removes all the campaign money and equipment from the Penguin, who vows to get even at the Ball.

At the Ball, Max is a leather-clad host, and the most popular costumes are Batman and Catwoman. No one comes as the Penguin, though dozens of oddly-decorated Penguin statues ring the rooms. Bruce and Selina both arrive as. . . naw, I won't spoil that one for you. Suffice it to say that they experience a very revealing conversation, interrupted by the attack of the army of armed penguins.

The Circus Gang and Penguin capture Max, *Punch and Juliet*, and the Mayor. They take them back to their old hideout, the Old Gotham Zoo's penguin citadel. Penguin blacks out the city, and it's up to Batman (astride his Bat-Ski-Boat) and Catwoman to stop him. Penguin has sent out hundreds of bomb-wearing penguins to destroy the city. *Batman contacts The Kid, who has "borrowed" the de-scrambling device from the Batmobile, and instructs him to de-scramble the electrical signals driving the bomb-laden penguins.*

From here, it's Batman versus the Penguin, while Catwoman faces down Max Schreck *and the kid tries to save Gotham City.* I won't tell you the ending, but suffice to say the Penguin finds out startling news about Schreck, several characters die, *the Riddler is mentioned, and Batman finds out that the Kid's name is . . . any takers? Oh, who could be surprised. The Kid's name is Robin.*

Batman Returns is a convoluted roller-coaster ride, with many inconsistencies and truly stupid plot-points. I'd guess Burton had a much more active hand in plotting it, as many of the over-indulgences in the script reflect his past films. While reading the story, I kept feeling as if it was trying to cross the *Batman* TV show with the gloomiest and sickest moments from the first film.

Penguin's dialogue is still atrocious. Batman and Catwoman's interplay is usually razor-sharp, though oftentimes pretentious. It is Batman's repartee with Alfred (Michael Gough, returning) and Commissioner Gordon (Pat Hingle, also returning) that comes off the best. When Alfred berates Batman for letting The Kid drive the Batmobile, Bruce replies: "Alfred, who let Vicki Vale into the Batcave? I'm down there working, I turn around, 'Oh, hi, Vicky, have a seat. . .' " Whether this line will make it in without The Kid is unforseeable.

Another of the few (too few) funny moments in the script occurs when a nerdish clown is discussing Batman with the others: "His family was killed in a meaningless act of violence and he does the bat-vigilante thing out of revenge. . . That's my theory." The sword swallower responds, "Damn, nobody wants to hear your boring theories. Man, why did we let you join the gang?"

Batman's multiple new Bat-gadgets had the ring of the TV show to them, especially the sewer-skimming Bat-Ski-Boat, and some of the contrivances of the script were downright awful. In a sequence removed from the film, Selina supposedly—in one afternoon mind you—installs a quicksand pit in her upper-level apartment floor that is not only deep enough to kill a man in, but completely matches the pink color of her rug! Why does the city allow hundreds of Penguins to remain at the old Gotham Zoo after it's closed? Penguins with bombs and machine guns? What the Hell is the mystic CPR thing the cats do to Selina that brings her back to nine lives?

Though more people will probably want to see *Batman Returns* for DeVito's Penguin, he comes off weakly in the script, a poor-man's Joker. Must every bat-villain from now on be a homicidal maniac who laughs and talks to himself, is jealous of Batman, and is horribly disfigured? Pfeiffer's Catwoman holds a much higher chance of holding the viewers' interest, as she ends up one of the more exciting characters in the script. In the preview trailer, she lacks much erotic tension, however tight the suit.

If indeed the role of The Kid has been dropped, at least you'll have a view of how he was to have been brought into the series. Rumors around Hollywood point out that Warner Brothers was skittish about having a black Robin in the film. This is base racism and deplorable.

If filmed as scripted, *Batman Returns* will most likely get very mixed reviews form the outside world. Of course, fans will still see the film but what little cohesiveness the first film had is blown to pieces in this one. Respecting most of Tim Burton's work, I'm willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, but I think most people will find *Batman Returns* not worth returning to.

BACKSTAGE TO THE FUTURE

Next month, we'll take our last nostalgic look to the past for a three-person interview with the cast of *Shazam!* Join me with old-timer Les Tremayne, Captain Marvel John Davey, and a brief reappearance by Michael Gray, celebrating the first reunion of the cast since the 1970's! We'll see you next month... Backstage!

For video information, write me at 2167 SW Yamhill #6, Portland, OR 97205. ●

A FEW WORDS with J.R. WILLIAMS

Interview by Jeffrey Lang

JEFF LANG: *You sent me quite a variety of stuff. Some of this I recognize from* Bad Comics *#1, but there's a lot here I've never seen before.*

J.R. WILLIAMS: The new material is from *Bummer*, which is coming out in May or June from Cat-Head Comics. Let's talk about that stuff. It's more timely, more pointed in the direction that I think my stuff is going, more towards the autobiographical.

LANG: *Like "State Fair?"*

WILLIAMS: More like "The Woman Who Tried to Eat Me Alive." That isn't necessarily entirely based on reality, but it definitely has a more solid base in fact than the stories like "A Night on the Town" or "Roll Call."

LANG: *What's going on in the more recent material? Have you been trying a new inking style?*

WILLIAMS: I think it's just a kind of natural progression. I tend to work in a variety of styles. Sometimes I'll come up with a story, and a style I'm using doesn't seem particularly right, so I'll have to develop something new for that material.

LANG: *How long have you been doing this? The oldest thing I see here is from 1986.*

WILLIAMS: I've been drawing for years and years, ever since I was a kid. I worked on papers in junior high school, high school, and college, but I didn't really get into publishing on a so-called "national level" until 1982 or '83 when I started doing comics for Clay Geerdes' *Comix World*.

LANG: *Who was that?*

WILLIAMS: Clay had a comics newsletter that he used to write articles for—mostly about undergrounds. When Jay Kennedy's price guide came out, there was an ad in that for Clay Geerdes' *Comix World*. Besides publishing the newsletter, he was also publishing minicomics. This was the first I had ever heard of this minicomics stuff, so that's basically how I got

...BUT, SHE WAS AGGRESSIVE, AND I WAS DRUNK & HORNY. TO MAKE A LONG STORY SHORT, WE GOT "INVOLVED."
I LOVE YOU.
-I KNOW.
THE DIFFERENCES IN OUR PERSONALITIES WERE IMMEDIATELY APPARENT -- I TEND TO BE RATHER QUIET & LAID-BACK; WHEREAS SUE WAS LOUD & FORCEFUL...
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE PEOPLE IN THIS PLACE?!? HEY, EVERYBODY! LIVEN-UP!!!
SHE'S A LIBRARY...
SUE'S BEST FRIEND WAS A HYPERACTIVE SUCCUBUS (LOOK IT UP) NAMED "SANDY," WHO DEVOURED MEN AT THE DROP OF A HAT (OR PAIR OF PANTS).
AAHHH, I WAS GONNA BREAK UP WITH HIM, ANYWAY.
:BELCH:
THEIR NIGHTS OUT TOGETHER USUALLY INVOLVED PLENTY OF DRINKING & DOPE-SMOKING, WHILE "SANDY" SEARCHED FOR NEW VICTIMS...
HMMM.. I DON'T THINK I SLEPT WITH THAT ONE YET...
Drink
BORN

Above: "The Woman Who Tried to Eat Me Alive," a true story. Below: Skinboy.

started. Through that, I started corresponding with a lot of guys who were just starting out at the time.

LANG: *Who were you reading at the time that made you more interested in minicomics than mainstream stuff? Or were you reading mainstream stuff?*

WILLIAMS: I wasn't really reading mainstream stuff. I kind of gave that up when I was in school. I started reading a lot of underground comics and magazines like *Weirdo* and so forth. I was really focused more in that direction.

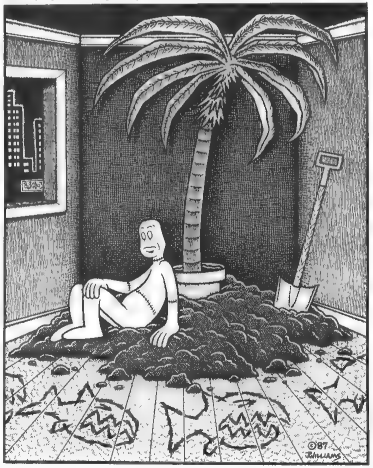
LANG: *The introduction from* Bad Comics *is by Pete Bagge. Do you think your style is similar to Bagge's?*

WILLIAMS: Well, it's kind of funny. Pete actually got started a little earlier than I did, but I wasn't really aware of his work other than through some things in *Weirdo*. Around the time when I was doing some of this minicomic stuff, a lot of the people I corresponded with encouraged me to submit work to magazines like *Weirdo*. I mailed a submission to Crumb because I thought he was still editor of the magazine. He had just decided to let Peter edit the magazine, so Peter wrote back and accepted the submission.

Round about the same time, I was moving from my little home town, Salem, up to Portland, and Peter and his wife Joanne were living in Seattle. So, after I had been living in Portland for about a year, I visited the Bagges and Pete offered me a place to stay. I actually ended up staying with Peter and Joanne for almost two months.

Meeting Peter was like meeting someone who could have grown up across the street. We're the same age and we have a lot of interests in common. That's kind of a long answer to your question, but we've both been developing and doing things at the same time, and there is a lot of similarity in our approach to material, just because we have so many things in common, I guess.

LANG: *Let's talk about "The Woman Who Tried To Eat Me Alive." I gather*



this is at least partly true.

WILLIAMS: It's completely true.

LANG: *Completely true. A vampire woman. That's scary. Are you one of those people who always have weird things happening to them?*

WILLIAMS: I wouldn't necessarily say that my life has been all that weird. My step-sister tells me that I'm the weirdest normal person she's ever met in her life [*Laughter*]. Outwardly, I'm not particularly strange, but I have a lot of peculiar interests.

LANG: *Such as?*

WILLIAMS: I have a really strange audio collection. I collect very strange recordings, and I've met a lot of people, including many cartoonists, who share this same interest. There's a big network of these weird bootleg recordings circulating around.

LANG: *We must be talking about something more extreme than Spike Jones.*

WILLIAMS: Quite a bit. One thing I've got that's particularly interesting is a collection of recordings or outtakes by celebrities. Are you familiar with the Buddy Rich tapes? There was someone in Rich's band that made recordings of Buddy Rich's cussing the band out.

LANG: *Didn't the Friedman Brothers do something about that?*

WILLIAMS: Yeah, and there was another guy, Lindsay Arnold, who actually transcribed the entire tape and turned it into a comics story. It runs for like twenty minutes, a constant barrage of Buddy Rich screaming and yelling at this band, telling them that they have to shave their beards off, stop blowing bad notes, or he's going to fire the whole fucking band. So, I've got a collection of out-takes like that.

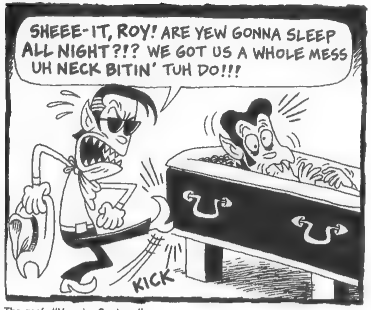
So, I guess I have real eclectic interests—bizarre stuff, but I don't have a pierced nose or anything, though, so I guess that's what my step-sister means.

LANG: *I've known people who seek bizarre experiences and others who, just by being who they are, are just led into strange kinds of things. Are you one of those?*

WILLIAMS: I don't think so. I've been doing some work with Denny Eichhorn on his book [*Real Stuff*], and Denny is one of those people who has those strange things happen to him. I knew Denny for a while before he started to write this book, and he always had some oddball story to tell.

LANG: *When did you decide to start doing autobiographical material. Most of the material I've seen so far has been parodies of TV shows, and "Bad Boys," and stuff that I'd have to call situation comedies. What made you decide to start talking about yourself more?*

WILLIAMS: I guess I'll probably



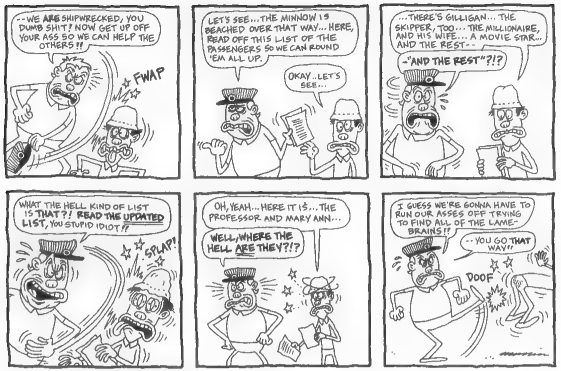
The goofy "Vampire Cowboys."

continue to do some of that situational type humor with more of a basis in reality.

Rather than sitting down and telling a long, drawn-out story, I find that I'm more interested in coming up with some sort of idea and theme that I'd like to explore for a while without making it into a big epic. I tend to have a short attention span about my own work. I really envy those people who can do book-length works, and some-

Bill and Bobby Badinski, "The Bad Boys."

YIPEE! WE ARE AT DISNEYLAND!!
I WILL HOLD OUR PLACE IN LINE-- YOU GO GET TICKETS FOR RIDES!
OKAY!
--WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?!
--I GOT ONE OF MICKEY'S EARS!!
WILLIAMS


...WE ARE SHIPWRECKED, YOU DUMB SHIT? NOW GET UP OFF YOUR ASS SO WE CAN HELP THE OTHERS!!
FWAP
LET'S SEE... THE MINNOW IS BEACHED OVER THAT WAY... HERE, READ OFF THIS LIST OF THE PASSENGERS SO WE CAN ROUND 'EM ALL UP.
OKAY... LET'S SEE...
...THERE'S GILLIGAN... THE SKIPPER, TOO... THE MILLIONAIRE, AND HIS WIFE... A MOVIE STAR...
"AND THE REST"?!?
WHAT THE HELL KIND OF LIST IS THAT?! READ THE UPDATED LIST, YOU STUPID IDIOT!!
SPLAT!
OH, YEAH... HERE IT IS... THE PROFESSOR AND MARY ANN...
WELL, WHERE THE HELL ARE THEY?!?
I GUESS WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO RUN OUR ASSES OFF TRYING TO FIND ALL OF THE LAME-BRAINS!!
...YOU GO THAT WAY!!
DOOF

A parody of—ah, you can probably figure it out yourself.

times think about heading in that direction, but I find that I'm much more satisfied exploring things in shorter terms. I think what I like to do with my material is take a fairly mundane situation like having a bad relationship, and then exaggerating certain points in it to bring the humor out. I think people like James Thurber were really good at that. I remember reading Thurber as a kid, and I think I was influenced by that kind of thing.

LANG: *What kind of reception have the TV parodies been getting? "Mr. Dead" and "Gilligan's Travels" are pretty raw, pretty lascivious.*

WILLIAMS: Yeah (snorts). Well, that's something that's kind of a recurring thing in my work.

LANG: *What? Lasciviousness?*

WILLIAMS: That line between "when is it comedy" and "when does it becomes too rough to be laughed at?" That comes up a lot. I guess it's kind of a sadistic streak—just to push that boundary, shake people up. There's always been a real cruel streak in humor, whether people want to acknowledge it or not. A lot of humor is based on a kind of cruelty, but the question is, how far does that go? How cruel do you get before it's not funny anymore, and I think I have a tendency to go over that line [*laughter*], and I think I *enjoy* doing it over and over again.

LANG: *Yeah, it is pretty extreme, especially the "Bad Boys." Where did that all start?*

WILLIAMS: I have friends that I grew up with, and we used to sit around and draw comics, but it seemed like a lot of our material took sort of a sadistic streak. I think kids kind of have a streak like that . . . like all the violence they see at the movies and on TV comes out in different ways.

LANG: *Until it's beaten out of them.*

WILLIAMS: Yeah, right. Originally, I didn't draw the Bad Boys for publication. I had this book that this childhood friend and I had found. It was mostly blank, but it was actually a listing of the people who had belonged to a certain parish who had died. Some of the pages had listings with these people's names and the things they had accomplished in their lives. This appealed to us because of its deathly overtones, so we started drawing and writing all kinds of bizarre stories in it. We traded this book back and forth, and we're still doing it. The Bad Boys is one of the things I started drawing in that book.

The first story was a take-off on the old Tom Sawyer/Huck Finn thing where, when you go to the graveyard, you have to take a dead cat with you, and they didn't have a dead cat. They found one that was in the street that was smashed and smelled bad, so they decided that they needed some *fresh* dead cat, so they killed their own.

"Mister Dead," another pop culture parody.

...ED!!! YOU CAN SPEAK--!! B-B-BUT HOW!?! Y-Y-YOU'RE D-D-DEAD!!!
WILBER I'M COLD! IT'S SO COLD...
OHMYGOD-- WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?!?--ED, I'M HERE!!!
HELP ME, WILBER!! I--I'M SCARED!!
GOD-- HOW DOES HE DO THAT WITHOUT MOVING HIS LIPS?!?
OH-H-H-H...

A YEAR OR SO LATER, RAT'S BEASTLY HABITS PROVED TO BE HIS UNDOING. ONE DAY, MY MOTHER LEFT A BLOCK OF FROZEN HAMBURGER OUT TO THAW...
WHIFFA WHUFFA SNUFFA
?!?

From the Williams one-pager in the next *Real Stuff*.

After I had drawn this, before returning it to Bob, I decided that, "Well, maybe I'll just go ahead and publish it," so I made a minicomic out of it. It got some reaction, and so I decided to revive the characters for different stories. After a little while, they just started writing themselves.

LANG: *What is Skinboy all about? You use yet another completely different style, a much darker kind of world. The Bad Boys are bad, but they're funny. Skinboy is just scary.*

WILLIAMS: Yeah, he's more of a victim, whether he's being victimized by outside forces or his own phantoms. I did a couple minicomics with Skinboy where he was a speaking character. It was, I don't know, it was real horrifying stuff—lots of monsters were coming out. I was focusing on the dark side of things. I generally have a pretty optimistic outlook, though I'm pessimistic about the state of the world . . . which is a pretty contradictory statement!

LANG: *Yeah, what does that mean?*

WILLIAMS: It means that I'm not particularly optimistic about the future of humanity. In some way, eventually, mankind is going to run itself into the ground. I know that sounds sort of apocalyptic, but I guess I have a real negative attitude about forces beyond my control, the people who run things. I guess the Skinboy stuff is just my anxieties coming out. I used to have nightmares about nuclear holocausts, the end of the world.

LANG: *A lot of cartoonists I've talked to have those kinds of nightmares.*

WILLIAMS: Really?

LANG: *Yeah, and they all have the same reaction to them—they just draw.*

WILLIAMS: It's very therapeutic. I also think that a certain amount of that attitude might tend to sway people into becoming cartoonists. For one thing, the autonomy of being cartoonists is very persuasive, very desirable. We want to have total control over our output. It's just a way of dealing with your frustrations, the things that you are unable to control. It helps you cast out some of those demons. ●

...BUT PLEASE... DON'T GET THE IMPRESSION THAT I SUDDENLY BECAME AN INVASIVE, VENGEANCE-SEEKING CREATURE...
...ON THE CONTRARY...
BABY HEARTS

From "They Made Me a Monster," appearing in June in *Bummer*.

BY J.R. WILLIAMS

Contributor

Centrifugal Bumble Puppy (Fantagraphics)
Clay Geerdes' Comix World
Clinton St. Quarterly (Portland, OR)
Dog Boy (Cat-Head Comics)
Giant-Size Mini Comics (Eclipse, #3)
Honk! (Fantagraphics)
Portland Permanent Press (Portland, OR)
Rip Off (Rip Off Press, #'s 17, 26)

2 Live Crew (Fantagraphics, #1)
Neener Ploy Magazine (Portland, OR)
Northwest Extra! (Olympia, WA—tabloid)
Seattle Star (Starhead Comics—Seattle-comics tabloid)
Tucson Weekly
Weirdo (Last Gasp, #'s 12, 14, 15)
Real Stuff (#'s 2-5)
Bumber Comics (Starhead Comics, Seattle, WA #1)
Hype (Seattle, WA #7—tabloid)
Buzzard (Cat Head Comics #'s 1, 3-5)
Snipe Hunt (Portland, OR—tabloid)
Zomoid Illustories (Ray Zone—collaboration with Peter Bagge)
The Best Comics of the Decade, 1980-1990, Vol. I (Fantagraphics)
The New Comics Anthology (Collier—MacMillan)
Splat! (Mad Dog Graphics #2)

Solo

Bad Comics (Cat Head Comics 1990—a collection of mostly previously published material)
Bummer (Cat Head Comics—another collection including some new pages)

Other Stuff

Death Cult/Jonestown Massacre Memorial Cards (Carnage Press, Somerville, MA—Trading Cards)
Mondo Suburbia! Trading Cards (Starhead Comics, Teat Horn Entertainment Network, Seattle, WA)
The Casual Casual Cultural Exchange (Art Exhibit)
Misfit Lit: Contemporary Comic Art (Art Exhibit—ongoing)

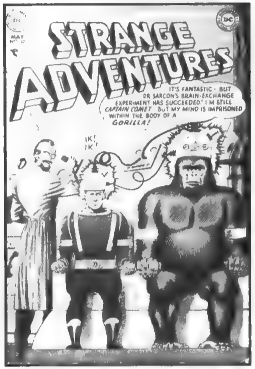
Don Rosa's Incredibly Intelligent DC Gorillas COVER GALLERY

Beginning with this issue, I have decided to cut the fooling around, and permanently change the focal point of this feature to spotlighting only DC comic book covers with incredibly intelligent gorillas. In fact, in this installment I will focus on covers of only *Strange Adventures* which feature incredibly intelligent gorillas.

The very first incredibly intelligent gorilla appeared on *Strange Adventures* #8 in early 1951; this could be considered the missing link between incredibly intelligent gorillas (I.I.G.'s) and nominally intelligent gorillas. Then in issues #32 & 39, Captain Comet had problems with a pesky I.I.G., and you know what a nuisance they can be sometimes. The answer to the question on the cover of #45: "Get a job drawing incredibly intelligent human comic covers for DCC (Detective Chimp Comics)." As for the covers of #53, 64, 69, & 75. . . perhaps DC was trying to TELL us something? Were I.I.G.'s threatening the fiber of our existence, our right to the government of our choice, and our right to bear semi-automatic weaponry?

NEXT ISSUE: More! More! More!

AMAZING SCIENCE-FICTION TALES!
52 BIG PAGES
STRANGE ADVENTURES
"EVOLUTION PLUS!"
"PLEASE BELIEVE ME! I AM THE VICTIM OF A TERRIBLE SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT! -RALPH"


STRANGE ADVENTURES
IT'S FANTASTIC - BUT DR. SARGON'S BRAIN-EXCHANGE EXPERIMENT HAS SUCCEEDED! I'M STILL CAPTAIN COMET - BUT MY MIND IS IMPRISONED WITHIN THE BODY OF A GORILLA!
IK! IK!

STRANGE ADVENTURES
Startling! CAPTAIN COMET EXPOSES "The GUILTY GORILLAS!"
MEMBERS OF THE ANTI-N.I.L. PROVE THAT THESE APES HAVE A HUMAN BRAIN AND THAT HE COMMITTED DELIBERATE MURDER!

STRANGE ADVENTURES
WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE ONLY HUMAN BEING IN --
"The GORILLA WORLD!"
INCREDIBLE - THIS BOOK'S BEATEN IS THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN MEN AND ANIMALS!

STRANGE ADVENTURES
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THESE PUNY HANDCUFFS WILL NEVER HOLD ME!
IT'S MR. X -- HE'S WEARING A HUMAN FACE-MASK!
WARNING! THIS MAN IS DANGEROUS!
$10,000 REWARD FOR CAPTURE OF MR. X
SOMETHING IN THE AIR IS WHAT I'VE ALWAYS FEARED THE WORLD!

ALL NEW STORIES
STRANGE ADVENTURES
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
Featuring "GORILLAS in SPACE!"
EARTHMEN ARE PREPARING TO LAUNCH THEIR FIRST SATELLITE
BUT WE MUST PUT A STOP TO IT!

REviews

NEXT MEN #1

Colored by MATT WEBB; Published by DARK HORSE COMICS; Everything Else by JOHN BYRNE

Superpowered youths born in a top secret research project overseen by a ruthless megalomaniac . . .a tough but compassionate "normal" human who befriends the youngsters. . .the alienation and sense of wonder experienced by our heroes once they enter the "real" world. . . .

If this were the '80s, we'd be talking about Eclipse's *DNAgents* comic. However, since this is 1992, our subject is *John Byrne's Next Men*, the latest title from the Dark Horse stable. Both series share a common foundation, though Byrne himself has never read an issue of *DNAgents*, and he says that as the *Next Men* saga unfolds his creations will bear less and less resemblance to their predecessors. It seems likely Byrne will be as good as his word; *DNAgents* stories were often character-driven while the *Next Men* seem oriented toward flat-out run 'n' gun action.

The question becomes: is that neccessarily a bad thing? We wouldn't be here reading *Amazing Heroes* if we didn't enjoy turbo-charged super-hero excitement, and during his long and prolific career John Byrne has certainly proved himself a master of the form. In this inaugural issue he demonstrates that he can still BIFF! BLAM! BLOOIE! with the best of them, and it's refreshing to see Byrne BIFF!-ing and BLAM!-ming in a milieu all his own, free of the cross-continuity burdens of Marvel and DC's cumbersome universes.

What's *not* refreshing is Dark Horse's slick packaging of *Next Men #1*. The embossed cover would be more impressive if "The Big Two" hadn't been jamming this sort of thing down our throats over the past several months, and the center of the book sports a certificate which, when coupled with the certificates to be published in each of the next five issues, may be redeemed for "a nifty set of trading cards. . .available no other way." Of course, the buyer who wants both the cards and pristine copies of *Next Men #1-6* is forced to purchase multiple copies. . . .

Like a good James Bond movie, *John Byrne's Next Men #1* combines bullets, explosions, super-science, and melodrama into one slick, fast-moving whole. This reviewer hopes the series succeeds due to its narrative strengths and not due to Dark Horse's crass marketing efforts.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ —*Bruce Canwell*

BATMAN/JUDGE DREDD: JUDGEMENT ON GOTHAM

Written by ALAN GRANT and JOHN WAGNER; painted by SIMON BISLEY; edited by STEVE MACMANUS and DENNY O'NEIL. Published by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS and DC COMICS

Bruce Wayne *isn't* the Dark Knight; it's *really* Simon Bisley.

Bisley, the maniacal genius behind *Doom Patrol*'s crackpot covers and one of Lobo's closest pals, patrols the scum-wrecked streets of Mega-City One and Gotham City with inflexible determination, a snapshot taken of every impurity. However, unlike Brian Bolland in Alan Moore's pristine *The Killing Joke* or Dave McKean in Grant Morrison's vividly bent *Arkham Asylum*, Bisley is creatively castrated by a scanty script in this breathlessly awaited team-up between England's imperious law-enforcement stud and America's weepy watchdog.

Bisley's daft art style—a cross between Richard Corben's steroid-pumped eroticism and Bill Sienkiewicz's hallucinatory gloom—is almost stunning enough to defend the argument that graphics are more important in a comic book than the *story*, but not quite.

Woefully, two brains—even those from that wellspring of illustrious visionaries, Britain -couldn't construct a meatier plot than having Batman and Judge Dredd bust a gory brawl at a heavy-metal concert. Since neither Alan Grant nor John Wagner's individual Batman and Judge Dredd tales have achieved the complexity of many of their compatriots' works, disappointment was in the offing, but for 4.99 pounds ($5.95 in the U.S.) expectations had to remain high, especially for cost-conscious fans.

Still, the combined sick wit of Grant and Wagner can provide decadent chuckles despite the thin, feeble-minded plot. The Scarecrow singing, "Hark to the merry GLIP! GLIP! GLIP! of the cranial fluids," as juice drips copiously from a corpse's head echoes the unscrupulous juvenile humor of '50s *Mad*, and Judge Death slipping his fingers under people's skin is eerily funny. But the effectiveness of these scenes rely heavily on Bisley's morally damaging drawings.

Judgement on Gotham is available in two formats. The DC version is significantly inferior to Fleetway's wider, taller edition. Shrunken, Bisley's art loses much of its Gothic majesty. Whatever the format, though, the contents remain the same. *Judgement on Gotham* is a glossy knockout, but it's emotionally hollow.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ —*Michael Sutton*

PEEPSHOW #1

Written and illustrated by JOE MATT; Published by DRAWN AND QUARTERLY

This is another autobiographical-minutae comic in the tradition of *Yummy Fur* and *American Spendor*. And one that can get on the nerves more than most, since if Joe Matt's portrayal of himself had been written by anybody else, he would have had grounds for a major lawsuit.

Among other things, we're supposed to believe he's a self-involved, hyperactive neurotic, addicted to masturbation, rude and inconsiderate (not to mention abusive) to his girlfriend, and prone to moments of uncontrollable, raving paranoia. The first issue of his new comic has him obsess at great length about an exotically beautiful young lady new to his neighborhood, threatening his already shaky relationship with his lady friend Trish.

Material like this is always risky; handled incorrectly, it becomes the equivalent of picking scabs in public. Matt has always managed to avoid that trap by the simple expedient of being funny as hell. He may or may not be as creepy as he wants us to think, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that Joe Matt on the printed page is a fascinating comic character, whose hangups and obsessions go beyond merely neurotic into the realm of farce.

In *Peepshow #1*, he eschews the tiny little panels that previously distinguished his work. His pages now have the traditional comic-book layout of six big panels a page. This is a mixed blessing. The comedic qualites of his comics suffer from the immediacy his more detailed artwork brings. But the roomier art is easier on the eye, and easier to take as real events happening to real people. It also gives him the opportunity to show that he's very good at settings and body language. I'll miss the little itty bitty panels, and I hope they're not gone for good, but the roomier stuff is definitely a step up.

Incidentally: two of the supporting charcters in this first issue are fellow cartoonists Seth and Chester Brown. Strictly speaking, that makes this a multi-comic crossover. You better pick it up. Otherwise you'll lose track of continuity, and then where will you be?

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ★ —*Adam-Troy Castro*

Joe Matt's self-libelous *Peep Show*.

THEN YOU WHAT?!
"I GAVE HER A BLACK EYE. SO WHAT? SHE GRABBED MY BRUSH WHILE I WAS INKING & I HAD TO TEACH HER A LESSON. MY ARTWORK'S PRECIOUS TO ME.
C'MON--I SAID I WAS SORRY! WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT FROM ME? YOU SHOULD'VE KNOWN I'D REACT LIKE THAT. IT WAS JUST A REFLEX. BESIDES YOU'VE GOTTEN VIOLENT WITH ME MANY TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT. ANYWAY THINGS'LL BE BETTER ONCE YOU START THAT JOB NEXT WEEK...
NEXT WEEK!
WELL? HOW WAS YOUR FIRST DAY AT WORK? WHAT WAS THE SUMMER CAMP LIKE? HOW MANY KIDS WERE THERE? TELL ME EVERYTHING!
I KNOW YOU'RE ONLY FAKING INTEREST OUT OF GUILT BUT I'LL TAKE WHAT I CAN GET.
I LOVE MY NEW JOB! I HAD SO MUCH FUN TODAY. ME, JEANNIE AND ANOTHER GIRL ARE IN CHARGE OF TWENTY CHILDREN. ONLY, IT'S NOT A TYPICAL SUMMER CAMP--FOR STARTERS, IT'S IN THE CITY...
--AND SOME OF THE KIDS ARE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED.
Y'MEAN, "RETARDED"?
YEAH, BUT THE CAMP DISCOURAGES THAT WORD-- THEY PREFER "SPECIAL".
OH BROTHER
OH! I ALMOST FORGOT! I GUESS WHO WORKS THERE WITH ME? THAT GIRL WE SAW ON THE STREET WITH THE DREAD-LOCKS!

CAN I DO MY HOMEWORK OVER HERE ?
ANY IDEA HOW LONG YOUR FOLKS WILL BE AWAY ?
THEY LEFT 126 FROZEN DINNERS.
Pinkwater/Auth
WHAT'S DOING ?
I'M JUST RUNNING SOME TESTS ON THIS GRAHAM CRACKER. I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE IT'S PRE-DYNASTIC EGYPTIAN.
WOW !
THIS COULD REVOLUTIONIZE THE STUDY OF ARCHEOLOGY - AND ALSO PROVE THAT THE EGYPTIANS HAD GRAHAM CRACKERS
NOPE. JUST AN ORDINARY MODERN GRAHAM CRACKER. FIVE MONTHS OF SCIENTIFIC WORK DOWN THE DRAIN.
SNAP OFF A HUNK OF THAT FOR ME. WILL YOU ?

Daniel Pinkwater & Tony Auth's short-lived *Norb*. The dailies have now been reprinted by MU Press.

NORB

Written by DANIEL PINKWATER; drawn by TONY AUTH; Published by MU PRESS

For every *Peanuts* or *Alley Oop*, there are hundreds of newspaper strips that have a short life in a small number of papers, and disappear with only a few fans to mourn them. These strips are usually not very good, but sometimes their short existence is due to other reasons.

Norb seemed to have the right formula for success. It was written by Daniel Pinkwater, the author of numerous best-selling zany juvenile novels, and it was drawn by Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist Tony Auth. It mixed humor, light adventure, and fantasy. It was aimed at all ages, with an eccentric elderly scientist (Norb), a feisty teenage girl (Rat), and their friends, all traveling through time to save the world from such menaces as a megalomaniacal rock star, Viking raiders from the future, a haunted high school, and a giant robot pack rat. But it lasted for only one year.

This is a collection of the 312 daily strips that appeared between August 5, 1989 and August 4, 1990, there are two Introductions and a history of how *Norb* was created and what happened to it. In retrospect, it's an example of the old adage that if you try to please everyone, you're likely to end up pleasing no one. It was too advanced for most children and too juvenile for most adult readers. There was too much continuity for those who prefer the gag-a-day strips, but fans of the story comics considered it too silly and not adventurous enough. It was sold sight unseen to King Features on the basis of its creators' reputations, but (in Pinkwater's opinion) *Norb* was too weird for the syndicate's sales staff and it was not adequately promoted. Pinkwater and Auth came to feel that they were wasting their time with it, and it was discontinued by everyone's mutual consent after exactly one year.

Although *Norb* is thoroughly American, its type of whimsical adventure is more common to the British in such famous comedies as *The Goon Show* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Fans of those should give *Norb* a look. Unfortunately, this volume only contains the black & white daily strips; the 52 Sunday strips are omitted. Also, this $8.95 quality paperback is well-printed but flimsily bound. It will have to be handled carefully to keep the covers from coming off after a short time.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ½ —*Fred Patten*

JUGHEAD #32

Written by MARK McCLELLAN and BILL VALLELY; pencilled by REX LINDSEY; inked by ROD OLLERENSHAW; edited by DARYL EDELMAN. Published by ARCHIE COMIC PUBLICATIONS

I can imagine the conference going on somewhere in the offices of Archie Comics:

"'Market share?' What market share? Face it, guys, we've got to do something drastic! Here's my plan: Number One, *Continuity*. That's real popular with the Marvel zombies and the DC droids. We'll tie all the stories together. We can throw in chummy little notes from a smarmy editor. You know, "see ish #29, Delirious Daryl," that kind of thing. Just like the competition. See, this way the kids'll have to keep spending the bucks to keep up with all that's been going on."

"Number Two, we'll throw in a bunch of handicapped, er, that is, *physically challenged* characters. You know, a blind guy, a girl in a wheelchair. It'll make for. . . for *conflict*. Yeah. I like the sound of that—conflict."

"Number Three, Trump Card. *Recycled Paper*. What's the Bubblegum Brigade getting in school these days? They're up to their little ears in garbage—I mean Recycling. Environmentalism. So we'll go to recycled paper and play up the earth thing. It's topical. It's trendy. It'll sell! I, uh, what? Whadjasy? 'What about story?' *Story?* Get that guy outa here! He don't understand comic books!"

SIGH

Handicapped characters. Fine. Recycled paper. Great. But what about *story*? Take *Jughead* #32—please! A conglomeration of characters clatters through thirty-two cluttered pages, numbing the reader with a barrage of lame dialogue and inane editorial comments. I'm sorry, really sorry, because ordinarily I have great respect for Mr. Goldwater and Archie Publications. But this is just a mess. My kids didn't even like it.

I used to like Jughead—the classic teenager, gazing on the world with jaundiced eye. Now, under the tender care of frightened publishers, he comes off like a know-it-all, a jerk. I used to care about Big Ethel in her quest for love. Now, she's a liberated woman—tough as leather and bland as dry toast. As for the new, physically challenged "characters," while I applaud the good intentions behind their inclusion, they're still just ciphers. I don't care about them—or anybody else in this book.

The only good thing that can possibly be said for *Jughead* #32 is the fact that it's printed on recycled paper. Good idea. Print trash on trash, I say.

GRADE: ★ —*Gary D. Robinson*

BONE SAW #1

Written and illustrated by VARIOUS; edited by JOHN BERGIN and CAROLYN BERGIN. Published by TUNDRA

This one's a pricey anthology of fantasy and horror, with an emphasis on stuff that tries to stretch the boundaries of the category—what *RAW* would be like if it staked out Clive Barker territory. Which sounds like it could be good. Alas, what emerges is a failure of style over substance, effect over affect, poise and pretension over any real content.

I'll only have room to discuss a handful of the contents, but then discussing them all would be as pointless and depressing as the book itself. Take "Monkey Fear," by John Bergin. A tormented lab monkey dreams about the crucifixion of Christ, then in its struggles knocks the steel plate off its skull and reveals a brain filled with maggots. Strong images, but in the end, so what? What are you saying? That vivisection is nasty? Come on. We *knew* that already.

"Child With Head Wound," by Rene J. Cigler. Photographed junk sculptures of such neat stuff as baby dolls wrapped in piano wire. Again: So what?

"Slave Cylinder," by Jeff Holland and James O'Barr, the full-color centerpiece of the anthology. An androgynously punky young man drives a talking car through the desert, and, flying high on various drugs, fights a vicious road war with a gang of creatures identical to Wile E. Coyote. It's not nearly as fun as it might sound. There are lots of sexy closeups of the hero's dangling cigarette, and, just to prove the writer and artist are rilly rilly cool, a cameo appearance by cult author William S. Burroughs (who is here reduced to spouting old vaudeville gags). Wow, I'm impressed. But for the third time: So what?

Lawrence Watt-Evans, the biggest "name" contributor here, contributes a 160-word short story about a time traveller who tries to prevent the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The basic idea may be coverd with mold, but Watt-Evans does come up with a mildly interesting twist on it, and he doesn't make the mistake of wrapping it with layers and layers of empty attitude. Still, I doubt even he'd count it among the top hundred things he's ever written, and when, with only a few other (minor) exceptions, it's one of the only pieces in the book that doesn't immediately prompt a vigorous "so what?", the anthology as a whole comes up looking pretty damn empty.

GRADE: ★ —*Adam-Troy Castro*

G-8 AND HIS BATTLE ACES/THE SPIDER'S WEB #1

Written by CHUCK DIXON; pencilled by SAM GLANZMAN; based on characters created by ROBERT J. HOGAN and HENRY STEEGER; edited by DAVID CREWE. Published by BLAZING COMICS

There's such a thing as going to the well one too many times, Mr. Dixon. Oh, I like the pulps and the Golden Age of Comics as much as you do. I admire the way you (and others) have turned such faves as the Spider, Airboy, and the Shadow into gold. Hey, and packaging this latest effort a la the old Ace Doubles—two stories printed so that you can read another comic by flipping the cover over—is damn clever.

But this latest batch of characters is not exactly first-rate. Neither G-8 (a World War I flying ace complete with stereotypical comrades and a comic relief English butler) or Web-Man (a Hardy Boys type with a web-spinning gun) are memorable, and your scripting this time out doesn't exactly help matters. Both stories are riddled with clumsy prose and one-dimensional characters. The Web-Man story also suffers from a lack of purpose or plot. I assume the Time Machine MacGuf-

Jeff Holland & James O'Barr's "Slave Cylinder," from *Bone Saw*.

fin was your idea, Mr. Dixon: interesting, but little else than the deus ex machina.

Some background on the characters might have helped. Most of your readers are encountering G-8 and crew for the first time, and if you just toss them into the story they'll be thoroughly confused.

Sure, Sam Glanzman's art does capture the flavor of the period. But pretty pictures aren't going to give weight to a hollow story. And, while the low price of *G-8/The Spider's Web* will attract impulse buyers, I can't see its stick figure characters captivating its audience. Some good concepts, sure, but no cigar.

GRADE: ★ ½ —*Thomas Doja*

WARLORD #1

Written by MIKE GRELL; illustrated by DAMEON WILLICH and RICK HOBERG; edited by MIKE GOLD. Published by DC COMICS

"There is a world within our world," this story begins, "a world of eternal sunlight, and eternal danger."

This is the land of Warlord, the hero of Skartaris, who fell into that hollow-world realm from a hole in ours. In the old *Warlord* comic he pursued varied sword-and-sorcery adventures while bringing modern American ideas to that hidden fantasy land.

There was always something a little old-fashioned about the concept, although Mike Grell gave it visual style and pulled it off with panache. What sticks in the memory is not the stories from the past, but the artistic power of certain scenes and panels, vividly capturing the essence of the vicarious fantasy.

Now the concept is revived, presented in this first issue of a mini-series as a story remembered and told by the natives of Skartaris. Warlord is not forgotten; he is the subject of songs and fables, but the world he left is hardly different from the world he found.

It is, in fact, not much different from any other pseudo-medieval sword-and-sorcery world of fantasy fiction. This could be a place created by Rider Haggard, or Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard, or any of the fantasists of several generations ago.

We see little in the way of characterization or flesh-and-blood verisimilitude to Travis Morgan, who is featured only as a second-hand legend. The mixture of dinosaurs, sabre-tooths, lush vegetation, beer halls, pretty girls, and fisticuffs give Skartaris neither identity nor particular points of interest. The tie-in to Atlantis and human evolution is not convincing, and so appears silly.

What does not appear silly is the sense of disillusionment expressed by Morgan's faithful follower. "First he gave us the dream . . . Then he gave us nothing . . . He abandoned us, like he abandoned every friend he ever had." This is an intriguing angle, if we are willing to accept that in Travis Morgan there is a hero worthy of self-justification. This comic gives us no reason to believe so.

The story is focused on Warlord, but it does this through the eyes of the young balladeer who is pursuing his legend—a viewpoint character with almost no personality.

The art by Willich and Hoberg excels in facial close-ups and fantasy detail. The first panel, of alembics and arcane books, candles and columns and a hollowed globe, is a delightful expression of the spirit of the hollow world fantasy. Unfortunately, this visual evocation is not carried on throughout the rest of the comic, in which the Warlord stands like a Colossus of Rhodes above his spear-waving army.

There may be a story worth the telling here, but this introductory chapter fails to focus on it. "Focus on the man," is the advice of the final page, and I would hope that future issues do so.

Skartaris is "a land of dream" where "you must always expect the unexpected." This may be so, but the comic does not confirm it. It is primarily a string of cliches patchworked together.

GRADE: ★ ★ —*Elizabeth Holden*

MIRACLEMAN: APOCRYPHA #1

Written and illustrated by VARIOUS; edited by VALARIE JONES. Published by ECLIPSE COMICS

This three-issue miniseries is based on a wonderfully fun idea: four sets of creators present their takes on one hero. In this case the hero is Miracleman and the creators involved include Matt Wagner, Norm Breyfogle, Neil Gaiman, Kelley Jones, and a number of other fine creators. It's entertaining to see what each group comes up with, especially since the four versions of the character are different enough to be intriguing.

Steve Moore and Stan Woch present the first story, a charming Golden Age-styled tale involving a magic pen that can create anything. Moore's story is true to its influences, although Woch's art style is a bit too refined to be completely appropriate.

The second story, by James Robinson and Kelley Jones, involves Kid Miracleman. Robinson and Jones present two versions of the same story here. One presents Kid Miracleman/Johnny Bates as innocent adolescent having innocent fun and fighting petty crime. The other shows him as a homicidal rapist. The difference is chillingly effective—it's easy to remember that Bates is the man who utterly devastated London on one of Alan Moore's final *Miracleman* issues.

Sarah Byam and Norm Breyfogle present a story of Miracleman and his wife & child on vacation. It dwells, strikingly, on a wonderful family vacation that abruptly ends as Miracleman's reality intrudes. Byam and Breyfogle's story was the most touching to me, as in the conclusion the godlike Miracleman mourns the loss of his simple human life.

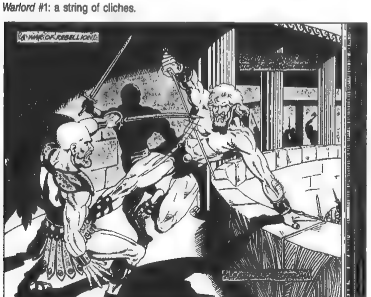
The final story, by Matt Wagner, contains some absolutely spectacular art. Wagner's figure art and, I assume, coloring, are as vibrant and gorgeous as any I've seen in comics. The story went over my head, but that's irrelevant when you look at Wagner's amazing artwork.

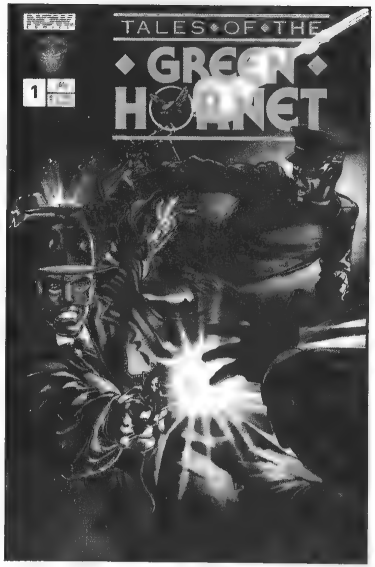
Tying all these together is a framing story by Neil Gaiman and Mark Buckingham that is finely appropriate.

This is a wonderful package, well work checking out.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ½ —*Jason Sacks*

Warlord #1: a string of cliches.





TALES OF THE GREEN HORNET #1

Written by JAMES VAN HISE; penciled by DELL BARRAS; inked by JOHN STRANGELAND; edited by JOAN M. WEIS. Published by NOW COMICS

Tales of the Green Hornet. I like the "Tales of" preface. It seems to say that the publisher knows he's not creating great literature, so the pressure is off the writer and artists, and the reader can look forward to a good ol' slam-bang comic-booky time. The way I see it, any comic book entitled "Tales of" can't be all bad.

And this one certainly isn't all bad. It's nothing to make you knit your brow, just straight-forward action-adventure. Elderly Britt Reid, grand-nephew of the Lone Ranger, remembers how he himself acquired an ethnic sidekick and a vigilante mask back in the '30s. He doesn't put on the mask in this issue, which merely introduces the crime reporter and his Japanese dissident friend Kato, and explains why Britt becomes the Hornet—because "one man can make a difference."

Actually, Dan Reid's philosophy seems wiser to me. Says the elder Reid, "There's only so much one man can do. That's why it takes many good men working together to effect change." Ah, but his son is young, and besides that, if he weren't slightly demented, like all masked crime-fighters, there'd be no *Tales of the Green Hornet*.

Reid makes enemies of Kato's enemies, the Japanese imperialists, and this issue closes on an ominous, literate note: "You have won the day but the night will be ours. And the night will be neverending."

Not bad. I do have one major complaint, however: the artwork. Not only are the characters devoid of real expression—either grinning or grimacing like shoddy dolls—but there's no sense of time or place. The clothing and hairstyles don't reflect the 1930s. If the writer hadn't told me, how would I know that his soldiers are *Japanese* soldiers? I can hardly tell the races apart. The book is full of close-ups covering the artist's embarrassing ignorance of history and culture. Yes, I know it's just a comic book, but I still feel cheated.

The end result is mediocre when it could have been good. As I say, it doesn't have to be great literature, but it ought at least to be a good comic book.

GRADE: ★ ★ —*Gary D. Robinson*

BOOK REVIEW

THEO THE DINOSUAR

Written and illustrated by PHIL YEH; Published by THE INTERNATIONAL HUMOR ADVISORY COUNCIL.

First of all, what this isn't is a comic book, even though it does bear an external resemblance to a Marvel graphic novel. What this is is a very sharp looking children's book designed with the overt purpose of promoting literacy among the playground set. On that level it's a sharp product.

Seems that back in the bad old days, while the dinosaurs were cheerfully munching their way towards extinction among the volcanoes, there was one peculiar volcano which spit out books, which most of the dinosaurs used for salad. Then one day the volcano spits out a "Lava Computer" which is found by a little dinosaur named Theo Saurus (get it?) and his three friends. (Obviously, the message is more important than the plot here.) The Lava Computer teaches the dinosaurs to read, which of course leads to all kinds of literacy-promoting adventures.

I could quibble with the message. For instance, books don't fall out of the sky, they're created by a lot of hard work. More importantly, every word found on the printed page is definitely not a golden path to fun, never to be questioned or doubted. The written work needs to be examined and analyzed. But heck, we let Ollie Stone make *JFK*, so I guess we can cut Phil Yeh some slack on his propagandistic message. It's still a good cause.

Yeh's cartooning, as always, is sharp, though I found his colors a bit dark and garish. His goofy, odd,

lovable characters work is great, though. Yeb's a fine cartoonist, and his commitment to his chosen cause of literacy is more than commendable, and saying anything bad about his work would just be petty. (Although I do feel obligated to point out that the foreword by Barbara Bush, trumpeted on both covers, is all of four lines long.)

There's not much here for the average comics fan, but if you're a parent or a teacher dealing with primary-age kids (reluctant readers or not), this is an excellent resource and a heck of a lot of fun, besides.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ★ —*Chris W. McCubbin*

VIDEO REVIEW

THE COMIC BOOK GREATS: TODD McFARLANE

Hosted by STAN LEE. Directed and produced by RICHARD B. STAWINSKI. Released by EXCELSIOR PRODUCTIONS/ STABUR HOME VIDEO

Todd McFarlane Video Fun Facts

1) Todd is left-handed, and holds his drawing utensils in that awkward way that left-handed people do.

2) The outer packaging for this video tape gives fans a first look at *Spawn*, Todd's new project. (The character is also featured on artwork behind Todd during the interview.)

3) Todd's lovely wife, Wanda, and their adorable new baby, Cyan, make a guest appearance in the video.

4) Todd laughs like Horshack from *Welcome Back Kotter*.

5) Todd gets through the entire tape without saying, "fuck."

This is the first tape in Stabur's new video interview series. The interviewer is Marvel figurehead Stan Lee, who actually isn't a bad choice; Lee's a chatty, friendly fellow, and one of the few comic professionals who'd probably be recognized by the general public.

The first half of this 50-minute tape is a pretty straightforward one-on-one interview with McFarlane. The two men sit in a well-lit studio, with poster-sized examples of McFarlane's art behind them. Lee asks about the standard topics—McFarlane's background, how Todd broke into comics, who his influences are, his philosophies and advice to aspiring artists, etc.

McFarlane keeps this material entertaining, with his honest (and often self-deprecating) responses to the questions. Like Lee, Todd is very comfortable in front of the cameras, and he goes on and on at length, telling his stories and revealing his "tricks of the trade." There's a good rapport between the two men—they're having a friendly conversation on a wide variety of topics rather than a tedious question and answer session.

But visually, it's still all talking heads—close up on Todd, close up on Stan, medium shot of the two of them sitting at he table. The interesting visuals don't occur until the second half of the tape, when Todd goes over to the drawing board and shows us how to do all the things he's been taking about. We get to watch Todd demonstrate some basic storytelling techniques, as well as the "gimmicks" (such as how he draws Spider-Man's webbing). There's even a neat parlor trick that Todd performs, using two lines on his page.

All through this, McFarlane explains what he's doing in a straightforward and entertaining manner. Aspiring comic artists should appreciate the information provided here; for a non-artist like me, watching Todd explain the way he draws was somewhat like watching a magician reveal how he does his tricks.

This video is a pretty entertaining time waster. At $20, it's probably not worth buying, unless you're a die-hard Todd McFarlane or Stan Lee fan, but if your local comic or video store rents out copies of this, it is worth taking a look at.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ½ —*Leonard S Wong*

VIDEOS

VIDEO KILLED THE COMIC BOOK STAR

by Michael Sutton

MARVEL VIDEOS

Released by BEST FILM AND VIDEO

"When Captain America throws his mighty shield
All those who chose to oppose his shield must yield
If he's led to a fight and a duel is due
Then the red & the white & the blue will come through
When Captain America throws his mighty shield."

Go ahead and gag. Even Stan Lee—whose name adorns every Marvel comic—probably wouldn't take credit for that musical monstrosity. However, after watching the programs which inspired it and other immeasurably cheesy numbers, I think their composers should be pitied, not scoffed at.

A handful of the Marvel superheroes cartoon shows from the 60's, 70's, and 80's have been released for VCR viewing by Best Film & Video Corp., and adults who savored such anesthetic fare as children are more likely to succumb to the cartoons' lackadaisical animation than today's post-*Akira* kids. Those who complain about Hollywood's indifference towards comic book characters now have additional opportunities to spew venom.

But, still thy forked tongues, lads! Before any critical evaluations of these tapes are to be made, a stiff middle finger to Best Film & Video for false advertising. On the box for *The Fantastic Four: The Menace of Magneto*, the Human Torch is presented in all his infernal glory, but hot stuff doesn't appear, nor is he mentioned, in the cassette within. (Matchhead was replaced—reportedly to cool fears of impressionable brats burning themselves in homage—by the insufferable Herbie the Robot in this 1978 NBC series.)

However, with or without the Torch, this adaptation of the Fantastic Four is less than fab. In *The Menace of Magneto*, the old X-Men foe challenges Mr. Fantastic to a duel, with the leadership of the group as the prize. The rest of the FF witness the proceedings like blank-faced mannequins. Young fans turned on by Marvel's boisterous violence will doubtlessly be puzzled by such wimpomania, although it would've been a hoot if Ben Grimm and Herbie started placing bets.

Actually, there *is* an explanation for this lunacy which is not revealed until the climax. Still, it's easily unearthed after Magneto wins the battle and commands a suspiciously submissive Reed Richards to loot money from a bank. Written by Stan Lee (with storyboards by FF co-creator Jack Kirby), *The Menace of Magneto* is forgettable fun; as if Magneto fondled the tape, your memory of the episode will be erased while it's unspooled before your eyes.

The talents of Lee and Kirby were treated even more execrably in the Marvel super-hero cartoons from the late '60s. If *The Menace of Magneto* caused retention problems, then many of these videocassettes might as well have been blank tapes. Episodes of *The Mighty Thor*, *Iron Man* and *Sub-Mariner* were repeatedly rewinded by me because only vague images—a second or two of low-grade animation—could be recalled shortly following each broadcast. If it wasn't for this article, not remembering these shows would be a blessing.

In *The Mighty Thor: Enter Hercules*, Donald Blake (oddly misidentified on the box as Eric Masterson) discloses his thunderous alter-ego to his ailing (lovesick?) mush partner Jane Foster, who confesses that she has a yen for both of them. Kinky! Before the three can indulge in a *Miracleman*-ish horizontal marathon, however, Thor's poppa Odin poops the party by punishing his son for shedding his secret to a mortal. Hercules then arrives in the city, although the reasons for it have been expunged from this critic's brain, and only a sadist would suggest taking notes.

At first, Jane mistakes Hercules for her blond bimbo, but decides to dupe Thor into believing that she wants to ride Hercules' chariot as well. What a bitch! (Maybe they should've retitled this tale "Enter Jane Foster" instead.)

Unendurable theme songs and torpid storylines aside, what ultimately sinks these cartoons from the hippie era—including *Sub-Mariner*, *Iron Man*, and the unexpectedly violent *Captain America*—are their cheaper-than-thou animation. Panels from Marvel comic books were cut and set against different backgrounds, with superimposed movable lips and, infrequently, arms and legs. The process often attained heights of unsurpassed inefficiency, like when Captain America "glides" across a floor in *The Origin of Captain America*.

Possibly the only Marvel cartoons that conveyed any wit or artistry were the Spider-Man programs of the '70s and '80s. Best Film & Video should focus their efforts more on releasing video cassettes such as *Doctor Doom*, *Master of the World* and *The Origin of the Spider-Friends*. Both are 25-minute wonders with improved characterization, stories and graphics. They are enjoyable, and not because they remind one of a childhood which has long since died. The same cannot be said for the army of boob-tube cadavers that Best Film & Video has sought to revive.

***The Fantastic Four*— GRADE: ★ ½**
***The Mighty Thor*— GRADE: ★**
***Sub-Mariner*— GRADE: ★**
***Iron Man*— GRADE: ★**
***Captain America*— GRADE: ★ ½**
***Amazing Spider-Man*—GRADE: ★ ★ ★**
***Spider-Man & His Amazing Friends*— GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ½**

MARVEL

TEAM UPS AND DOWNS

by Jason Sacks

ALPHA FLIGHT #106

Written by SCOTT LOBDELL; penciled by MARK PACELLA; inked by DAN PANOSIAN; edited by BOBBIE CHASE

AVENGERS #345

Written by BOB HARRAS; penciled by STEVE EPTING; inked by TOM PALMER; edited by RALPH MACCHIO

AVENGERS WEST COAST #81

Written by ROY and DANN THOMAS; penciled by DAVE ROSS; inked by TIM DZON; edited by NEL YOMTOV

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #22

Written and penciled by JIM VALENTINO; inked by STEVE MONTANO; edited by CRAIG ANDERSON

NEW WARRIORS #21

Written by FABIAN NICIEZA; penciled by MARK BAGLEY; inked by LARRY MAHLSTEDT; edited by DANNY FINGEROTH

Alpha Flight #106 is the funniest comic I've read in a long time. Unfortunately, it's supposed to be serious.

Marvel has received a fair amount of positive press on this issue from magazines such as *Entertainment Weekly*. The comic presents a baby born with AIDS and a hero, Northstar, who is gay. AIDS and homosexuality are important matters; unfortunately, those matters are addressed with such cloying, juvenile insubstantiality that the mentions they make of them are condescending.

The book starts with an ugly, ugly cover by Mark Pacella and Bob McLoed of Northstar's huge face, tiny nose and enormous mouth tensed with rage. The art is so anatomically incorrect that Northstar looks like an underground comics character. The caption promises "Northstar™ as you've never known him before." Well, I've never known him at all, so I guess that's truth in advertising.

Inside we meet Major Mapleleaf—that's right, Major Mapleleaf, the super-powered Mountie with the goofy hat, big gloves, gun holster and all. Major Mapleleaf's son died of AIDS. Mapleleaf gets royally peeved when Northstar saves a poor innocent baby in a trashcan on the street who has AIDS. See, despite the fact that Northstar fights for his life constantly, lives a jet-set lifestyle and apparently has no family, he is granted custody of the child. The baby is hospitalized for the disease and Northstar stands a vigil for the baby—in costume, of course. He hangs out there with the rest of Alpha Flight—also in costume of course—including Puck, who smokes a cigar directly outside the Pediatric Intensive Care ward.

As this tearful vigil continues, Mapleleaf (ho ho) becomes more and more enraged until finally he can't take it any more. He flies to the hospital and breaks through the wall of Northstars's adoptee's room. Now, Major Mapleleaf is supposed to be Canada's finest World War II superhero. He's supposed to be the Canadian Captain America. So Mapleleaf's solution for his guilt and frustration over his son's death is not to go to a psychologist or a priest, but to break down a wall into an innocent baby's hospital room and attempt to kill the infant. Very heroic, eh?

So Northstar and Mapleleaf battle it out through downtown Toronto. Besides the hospital room wall, they destroy several stories of a skyscraper, a supermarket, a truck and several city streets. The whole time this goes on, Northstar and Mapleleaf debate the morality of talking about AIDS. The fight scene ends, amazingly, improbably, with the two men hugging and Northstar making the hypocritical and sanctimonious comment "it is past time that people started talking about AIDS. About its victims. Those who die. . . and those of us left behind."

The book ends with two full-page spreads. The first has Northstar crying while holding the baby in his amazingly long and over-muscular arms. The last page is a fake newspaper with the headline, "Alpha Flight's Northstar Proclaims Homosexuality."

All this sanctimoniousnes would be offensive if the book had any professional competence to it at all. Scott Lobdell's writing is so manipulative, his dialogue so unrealistic, his characterization so superficial that I quite frequently laughed at its inanity. Check out a line like "The man he knew is but a memory. Much like your 'daughter' will be."

The art, by Mark Pacella and Dan Panosian, is done in an ersatz Barry Windsor-Smith style that is plain ugly. Pacella has little command of anatomy; arms and legs are frequently at impossible angles. His characters, especially Northstar, often look different from panel to panel, and his action scenes are so amazingly confusing that they are incomprehensible.

It's nice that Marvel is farting in the general direction of AIDS victims. But the handling here of the disease is so superficial, banal, and idiotic that the comic doesn't promote AIDS awareness at all. All the comic says is that infants and gays get AIDS. There's no mention of how the disease is spread, who at-risk groups are, or information a reader could possibly find relevant to their life. Why address this vital issue of AIDS in *Alpha Flight*, with a circulation of only 70,000, instead a a best seller like *X-Men* or *Spider-Man*?

Alpha Flight #106 is just plain wretched.

GRADE: ★

Dig that crazy anatomy on Northstar!

The New Warriors is apparently a pretty hot book among teenagers right now, and it's easy to see why. Judging by issue 21, the comic features unique villains, a closely-knit group, and just the right amount of realism.

The featured villains this time are called the Folding Circle—a good, intriguing name. The Folding Circle's costumes are basically just high-tech versions of real life clothes, which is also a nice touch. The Circle seems to be teenagers who haven't completely manifested their super-human abilities. They also seem to be the servants of a larger conspiracy. It would have been nice to have been told more about who the Circle are, but writer Fabian Nicieza has much more time to develop the characters.

The New Warriors come across as a real team. When four of the heroes come together to meet a fifth who's in jail, their dialogue about their friend is realistic. The Warriors really do come across as being concerned about their friend.

The Warrior who's imprisioned is Vance Astro, alias Marvel Boy, who killed his father when his dad was trying to beat him. Vance really does seem torn up over his crime. He never considers escaping jail, or any easy, comic-booky solutions to his plight. Instead, he acts about the way you'd expect an average teenager in his circumstances to act.

The New Warriors is just a superhero comic. It has little to do with reality. But the book's realistic touches are effective, and the heroic battles are fun. I recommend this comic to Marvel hero fans.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★

Two years ago, just before the premiere of *Guardians of the Galaxy*, writer/artist Jim Valentino described the book as "a straight-ahead, balls-out, 100-mile-an-hour super-hero series." Issue 22 fits that description: it's quite exciting and very much in the Marvel manner.

Basically, *Guardians* #22 is all-out action. The Guardians fight Rancor and her minions for many pages with interruptions by subplots. Former Guardian Starhawk, who apparently is both a man and a woman, reappears —but is he good or evil?

Jim Valentino's script and art are slickly within the Marvel style while still maintaining some originality. He's especially adept with facial expressions.

Valentino's writing is equally appropriate for the material—it's light, breezy and exciting super-hero material. This is a typical Marvel comic in many ways.

GRADE: ★ ★ ½

Avengers #345 and *Avengers West Coast* #81 present chapters of "Operation: Galactic Storm." Galactic Storm is a star-spanning space opera involving 25 or so Avengers, three alien races, and a super-alien group based very closely on the Legion of Super-Heroes.

This type of story is exactly what I think of when I think of the Avengers. The stories in these two comics, by Bob Harras and Roy & Dann Thoma, contain huge battles, star-spanning adventure, a touch of characterization, treachery, the whole deal.

Avengers #345, in fact, contains the sort of scene I've always loved in the *Avengers*—the one where about 25 heroes gather around that round table with the "A" on it and decide who's going to be in the team. It sounds silly, I know, but that type of scene still gives me a bit of a rush.

These two *Avengers* comics are, again, more or less the normal bit of Marvel hero action. *Avengers* features star-spanning action with slick art. *Avengers West Coast* presents the Earth side of thing with somewhat more ordinary art.

Rating for both:

GRADE: ★ ★ ★

So what have I learned from my journey through Marvel's non-mutant super-teams? I've learned that most of them are quite consistently at a fine level of fun. None of this stuff will make you forget Alan Moore or Frank Miller, but as long as you expect slick tales of guys in skintight jumpsuits running around and punching each other, this group of titles is a good place to look. Unless you look at *Alpha Flight*, of course. ●

Avengers #345.

DC

THE WORLD OF BATMAN

by Alex Chun

LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT #28
Written and illustrated by MATT WAGNER; edited by ARCHIE GOODWIN

GOTHAM NIGHTS #1
Written by JOHN OSTRANDER; pencilled by MARY MITCHELL; inked by BRUCE PATTERSON; edited by DENNY O'NEIL

BATMAN: MASTER OF THE FUTURE
Written by BRIAN AUGUSTYN; illustrated by EDUARDO BARRETO; edited by DENNY O'NEIL

GREEN ARROW #58
Written by MIKE GRELL; pencilled by RICK HOBERG; inked by JOHN NYBERG; edited by MIKE GOLD

Writers have attempted at length to analyze the Batman's mass appeal. Here you have a hero devoid of super-strength or super-speed, and in fact lacks any extra-human abilities what so ever. Many people have argued that it is this latter quality which is responsible for his popularity; that any of us could be the Batman (that is, assuming we had access to the same monetary resources).

While this may be true, I would nonetheless like to propose a complementary theory for Bat-mania, which I think is backed up in the latest batch of Batman books.

The Batman mythos is not based solely on the Batman himself, but also on the environment that surrounds him. By environment, I mean the people around the Batman, the city he lives in and the villains that oppose him. It was the combination of these external forces that created the Batman, and these same forces have molded him into what we see today. And since these forces are ever changing and ever evolving, Batman is as fresh as when Bob Kane created him over 50 years ago.

They say that the measure of a hero's worth is based on the adversaries he faces, and if that little phrase is accurate, there's no greater hero than the Batman. Case in point is the latest issue of the *Legends of the Dark Knight*, which features Batman against one of his greatest nemeses, Two-Face.

Ironically, there are two reasons that set this book apart from the typical Batman book, and they are both the result of the same person, writer/artist Matt Wagner.

Wagner's artwork is very graphic, and his layouts are dynamic and innovative. Wagner's excellent use of minimal line work proves once again that less can be more when executed properly. Complementing the black & whites by Wagner is colorist Steve Oliff. Oliff resists the temptation to over color the book and instead opts for greys and other muted tones accentuated with splashes of red to set up some striking contrast.

The story by Wagner invokes memories of Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*. Two-Face's dual personality is again a focal point, except for one important difference: Harvey Dent is nowhere to be found. There are, however, two sides to Two-Face. On the one hand, Two-Face is very sane and calculating as he attempts to acquire an island (for what purpose we know not—yet) that Bruce Wayne is also interested in. Disguised as a French real estate investor, Two-Face uses a slinky French woman to rope in an unknowing real estate agent in to act on his behalf. On the other hand, Two-Face is the maniacal criminal, capable of the most heinous crimes (as when he sets out to assassinate a bevy of plastic surgeons), often perpetrated in the most gruesome manner. And throughout Two-Face's endeavors, the Batman remains one step behind.

The book is interesting because it features one of Batman's most complex adversaries, and it accentuates many of the Two-Face's trappings, including his fixation on the number two. Overall, this new *Legends of the Dark Knight* installment is most compelling. Aside from not being able to figure out how Two-Face initially escapes from Arkham, I found little not to like, and I'm very much looking forward to the story's conclusion.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ★

A new title that explores another aspect of Batman's environment is *Gotham Nights*, a four-issue miniseries written by John Ostrander, Like *Legends of the Dark Knight*, the focus of the book is away from Batman, in this case looking at the people he is sworn to protect.

In the city of Gotham there resides millions upon millions of people, and to each of them the Dark Knight represents something different. Among those that Ostrander has chosen to place under a microscope are a couple of yuppies, an elderly couple, a former Penguin goon, and a go-nowhere donut counter worker.

While the Batman tries to be as unobrustive as possible, his mere presence sends reverberations through the "common folk," and he is, in fact, sometimes viewed with resentment. To some, he is a reminder of the city's decline, to others he is a reminder of a troubled past, and to still others, he means absolutely nothing.

All the people in *Gotham Nights* have different agendas, problems, and worries, and in the grand scheme of things, the Batman is not all that significant. As in any big city, people are not necessarily trying to thrive, but survive, and in such an environment, the Batman might even be viewed with some cynicism. This issue lays the groundwork for these possibilities, and it is my hope that Ostrander will follow through on them.

The only funny thing about this book is the Eduardo Barreto cover, which bears little resemblance to the book's interior. The gritty cover portrays the Batman chasing down an armed bandit. The interior art by Mary Mitchell and Bruce Patterson, however, is more on par with the book's tone.

In this first issue, the Batman really doesn't make much more than a token appearance, and you know what? I like it that way. I've taken an interest in these non-super-hero characters, and I enjoy getting a feel for all of Gotham instead of just its alleyways. *Gotham Nights* shows that there is more to super-hero comics than just super-heroes.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ ½

Speaking of Eduardo Barreto, he's also the artist for the sequel to *Gotham by Gaslight*, *Batman: Master of the Future*. Now, where Barreto's artwork looked out of place on the cover of the *Gotham Nights*, he tailors his artwork rather nicely to Victorian Gotham, the setting for DC's first two Elseworld books. And where Mike Mignola's style suited the night motif in *Gotham by Gaslight*, Barreto's style matches this books daytime emphasis.

Like *Gotham by Gaslight*, this book is a one-shot and printed in the prestige format. Writer Bryan Augustyn again takes some of this inspiration from previous writings and in this case, that of Jules Verne. The foil in this book is a Alexandre LeRoi, a man ahead of his time. Like Captain Nemo from *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, LeRoi is a mad genius.

Matt Wagner's striking art for *Legends of the Dark Knight*.

But whereas Nemo traveled underwater, LeRoi moves about in a flying ship that very much resembles an airborne version of Nemo's submarine.

From his airship, LeRoi threatens to destroy all of Gotham unless the Mayor of Gotham yields to his demands and lets him lead the city into the next century.

Even with the emergence of LeRoi, Bruce Wayne contemplates putting the Batman into retirement. Wayne fulfilled his personal mission when he took out the Ripper in *Gotham by Gaslight*, but as this story would have it, Wayne decides to create a new vow: to protect the citizens of Gotham.

I have to admit that I still have trouble buying Batman back in the Victorian era, though Barreto does do a nice job on Batman's costume. I also got the feeling that the setting carried the book more than the story did. The story for the most part was predictable, and what little twists and turns the book contained seem contrived. I think that to pull these Elseworld books off there needs to be more than just a change of scenery and costumes.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★

Last month I took a look at Mike Grell's new mini-series *Shado*, a spin-off from Grell's *Long Bow Hunters*, so this month I decided to take a look at what he was doing with the regular *Green Arrow* book. I hate to keep repeating myself, but I really wish that Grell would do more illustrating, because then it might help cover up some rather thin plotting.

The first thing that struck me about *Green Arrow* #58 was the striking Grell cover depicting an arrow piercing the eye socket of a bleached white skull. But any comic book aficionado knows that covers rarely resemble the book's content. The second thing that struck me about this book was how little it had changed since I last picked it up a few years ago. Oliver Queen is still a street crusader, and that's about it.

Green Arrow #58 is the second part of a two-part story that involves terrorists' attempt to poison a large portion of the population with a radioactive substance. As luck would have it, Queen is one step ahead of the bad guys, and he literally nails them to the wall.

Not a real exciting plot, but then again neither is the artwork by Rick Hoberg. There are a lot of big talking heads and two-page spreads of scenery, and not much else. And actually, there's really not much in this book worth talking about. It's amazing how a character like Batman can flourish in a half a dozen books, but a character like the Green Arrow struggles to survive in a single title.

GRADE: ★ ★

ARCHIE

THE ARCHIE UNIVERSE?

by TM Maple

ARCHIE #395

Written by ROD OLLERENSHAW; pencilled by STAN GOLDBERG; inked by MIKE ESPOSITO; edited by VICTOR GORELICK

BETTY & VERONICA #50 & 51

Written by FRANK DOYLE, MIKE PELLOWSKI, HAL SMITH, and KATHLEEN WEBB; pencilled by DAN DECARLO; inked by ALISON FLOOD; edited by VICTOR GORELICK

JUGHEAD #31 & 32

Written by MARK McCLELLAN and BILL VALLELY; pencilled by REX W. LINDSEY; inked by ROD OLLERENSHAW; edited by DARYL EDELMAN

VERONICA #20

Written by ROD OLLERENSHAW; pencilled by DAN PARENT; inked by JON D'AGOSTINO; edited by DARYL EDELMAN

First, I must say that I'm not an "Archie fan." In fact, I've *never* really been an Archie fan. Oh sure, like many other comics fans, I used to read them occasionally in my (much) younger days, but I was never particularly taken with them.

However, with all of the talk of the "new" Archie Comics these days, it seems like a good time to take another look at that old reliable crew from Riverdale. (Besides, my editor "suggested" this as a topic for my column. . . .)

The first thing that struck me about these issues is that they all proclaim on the cover, "Inside Pages 100% Recycled Paper (Recyclable, Too!)" The second thing that struck me was that those inside pages seem to be of generally poor quality, with lots of creases and "waves" in them. However, the quality of the printing is generally quite satisfactory, and there were no rips or tears in any of the pages. Perhaps the "paper problems" are due to the handling of the paper during processing; maybe handling techniques have not been adjusted for the new type of paper. In any event, for a "standard format" comic book, the quality of the package is within the acceptable range.

Inside most issues, a two-page spread explains that all Archie comics are now being printed on recycled paper and that "hopefuly" the cover will also be printed on such paper in "the near future." And a "true fact" addressed to "comic book collectors' claims that this recycled paper will last as long as "regular paper."

All in all, this seems to be an excellent move by Archie; they should be applauded for it. While I suppose that there might be problems with using recycled material in deluxe/prestige/bookshelf comics (or maybe not: I'm not familiar with the latest in paper technology), its use in standard-format books would seem to be highly desirable.

This concern for ecology is found in *Archie* #398, which declares on its cover that it is an "Environmental Special." Actually, the environment is only tangentially involved in some of the stories. For instance, a compost box provides Archie and Jughead with a supply of worms to sell, but the story turns on a merry mixup of said crawlies with some Chinese food that Mr. Lodge orders.

However, each story does indeed contain an environmental "message" and that fact that the reader is not hit over that head with it is a plus rather than a minus, as it makes the message more likely to be enthusiastically received.

There are also four "Fact Sheets" giving information on the environmental theme of each story (composting, recycling, etc.). These contain advice and tips on concrete steps that readers can take themselves. This focus on things that can actually be done is commendable since it is easy, especially for younger people, to become overwhelmed by the immensity and complexity of environmental problems, which can easily lead to a state of depressed and quizzical inactivity. Sure, these "small steps" won't solve everything, but at least they're a start. And, of course, many many people, even now, do not follow all of these recommended and basic procedures. (Yes, including myself, I'm sad to say.)

GRADE: ★ ★ ★

Moving on to *Betty and Veronica*, I found the most "traditional" stories in the titles that I sampled for this column. My memory of Archie Comics is that all of the titles were more or less the same; you could hardly tell which title you were reading, based on the stories in it. The stories in these two issues of *B&V* reminded me strongly of those bygone times. Good standard Archie fun.

Some things have changed slightly, though. While Reggie is still a nasty piece of business, he no longer seems to have Veronica as a frequent co-conspirator. In fact, Veronica seems to dislike Reggie rather intensely these days.

Indeed, the major change I see here is that Veronica is much more "part of the gang" now. Sure, she's still the spoiled rich kid, but she's not as spoiled as she used to be and her image is much softer: It's sort of an endearing eccentricity, rather than a character flaw.

This has allowed Betty to "close the gap" with Veronica; she is much more like her archrival (if such a term can still be used) now. Sure, Betty's still "the nice one," but it's not so obvious now. There was a nice bit in which Veronica was wearing her new bikini while Betty was stuck with a more modest one-piece suit. However, the fact that this was one of *Veronica's* old swimsuits took the edge off the distinction.

The one story that stands out in these two issues is "Beautiful Dreamer," which features a rather weird "duel" between the two teenagers as they dream. Of course, the fact that what they're dreaming *about* is grabbing Archie away from the other brings us back to standard, everyday reality (Archie Comics style, anyway).

It is also interesting to not that the *B&V* lettercol is something akin to "Ann Landers" rather than the comments-on-previous-issues format usually seen in comics.

GRADE: ★ ★ ½

Now we come to the "big change" at Archie Comics: *Jughead*.

As if to pound home Jughead's most remarked-upon new feature (yes, I'm talking about his new hairstyle), the cover of #31 features no less than 25 views of his head (and one of a shocked reaction from Archie). This sort of makes up for the fact that in most of the stories in the other titles, Jughead still looks like his *old* self. Though I suppose that this could be due merely to using up "inventory" done before the Big Change.

Inside, we find that this is one title that doesn't look like all the other Archie titles, past or present. It's got continuity, with #31 opening with the conclusion of the search for Dilton's parents.

It's got *lots* of footnotes (in an Archie Comic?) referring to past issues and other stuff. It's the "J-Head Brigade," a team of devoted individuals fighting for what's right. It's got intra-team squabbling, as Dilton and J-Head argue frequently. It's got "social relevance," as the team features "handicaped" members. It's got a super-scientific organization to help the plotlines along. (Okay, so it's called Soys-R-Us. I didn't say that it all had to make sense.) It's got a catchy cover slogan ("Earth's Funniest Comic Book"). It's got a dynamic and admired hero as its star. Okay, so maybe I'm overstating that a *bit*. But we *do* find out, among other things, that Jughead is more handsome than Dilton and that Jughead is "one of the most well-adjusted and happy people" around. It's got a lettercol featuring snappy banter from the editor.

Does all of this remind you of something? Does the word "Marvel" come to mind?

Well, it did to me. Oh, sure, this is certainly *not* a totally Marvelesque comic; it still has something of the "feel" of a typical Archie comic. But only *something*. The Jughead here is a different being than the Jughead seen in the other titles. And when Archie shows up briefly, he seems quite out of place. So, maybe it's not too far-fetched to see "Dreaming With Daryl" as an Archiefied "Stan's Soapbox" or Soys-R-Us as an embryonic S.H.I.E.L.D. Time will tell.

In the meantime, we've got an odd hybrid here and it's difficult to tell if it will achieve an invigorating synthesis of its twin inspirations of Archie and Marvel, or if it will be an unsuccessful mishmash, taking only superficialities from others and failing to achieve a true heart of its own.

GRADE: ★ ★

The slogan on the cover of *Veronica* tells us that she is "The Whimsical Rich Girl." This reinforces her new status, first seen in *Betty & Veronica*, above. Although we do certainly see many examples of her giant ego (her fashion tips in "Veronica's Fashion Lies" are particularly nice in this regard), she is quite sympathetic. In fact, in perhaps the ultimate turnaround of the old Veronica as the scheming rich girl, the main theme of this issue is Veronica as the *victim* . . . of a *rich girl*! Yes, even richer than Veronica!

This certainly does tend to take the edge off much of the proceedings and make the stories much like those found in *B&V*. Still, this issue gave me the one out-loud chuckle of the six issues that I read for this column. (It's kind of hard to give you the effect here, but it had to do with a policeman's reaction to Mr. Lodge driving his own limousine.)

GRADE: ★ ★ ½ *(This includes an extra ½ for that out-loud chuckle)*

So where does this leave the "new" Archie Comics?

When all is said and done, it remains essentially the same as it has always been, And there's nothing wrong with that.

In two different issues, a point is made that the characters get parental permission before embarking on journies. This is a reminder that though the stories are *about* older teens, they are *aimed* at a substantially younger readership. And, to me, they seem to fit that function fairly well, Sure, the world of Archie and Friends is hardly the stuff of relentless realism, but at least for the pre-teen or younger-teen reader it is a closer approximation of teen life than what is found in most other mainstream comics. Plus, and here is perhaps that main point, it's a fair amount of fun: A nice mixture. Certainly, it's a welcome break from the relentless violence and cynicism of many comcis today.

But there have been changes, and they're mostly for the better, I feel. The increased cohesion from issue to issue (or even within the same issue) has been mostly beneficial. It is a little disconcerting to see "Marvelism" invade Archie, but mainly only because of the fear that the process might be carried a bit too far in the future.

Another major shift in focus is the emphasis on the environment—in the stories "public service" ads, editorial comments, and submissions from Fan Club members. Is Archie doing this because it's trendy and popular? Probably, at least in part. But what's wrong with that? It does seem to be handled rather well, and it might even do some good in its own little way.

It so happened that some of these issues featured the annual circulation figures. These were presumably gathered for a period before the Big Changes went into effect, and they do seem to indicate that Archie might be in some trouble. *Betty & Veronica* came in at an average of 47,000 copies per issue, *Archie* at 46,000, and *Jughead* at 36,000. Hmm, no wonder he was the one tapped for a revamping!

In another year's time, we'll see if these figures improve due to the New Look.

Amazing READERS

Send your comments on AH or any comics-related topic to: Amazing Readers, 7563 Lake City Way, Seattle, WA 98115

JASON SACKS
Seattle, WA

Yet Another Silly Comics-Based Song

I've got one more comics-related song that hasn't been mentioned in "Amazing Readers." The song is called "Evangeline" and it's on Matthew Sweet's terrific new album *Girlfriend*. Evangeline was a nun with a gun published by First Comics. In fact, on the lyrics sheet it has the note "Evangeline, as sung by Johnny Six. Based on First Comics' *Evangeline*, created by Chuck Dixon and Judith Hunt." I think Sweet has a thing about cool public women; "Evangeline" follows another terrific song called "Winona."

CYNTHIA FLUHARTY
South Pasadena, CA

Top Ten

Having popped two Midol, opened a "Lite," and gotten as comfy as one can on rented furniture, I now present my list of 10 best super-heroes of all time and I dare *anyone* to dispute it: (Presented in reverse order because that's the way it's done, naturally)

10) Doc Savage—because he's B.S. (Before Superman, who was a *rip-off!!*) but only the pre-World War II stories, though, when he didn't "notice" women and used all *five* of his men especially Johnny, so there!

9) Darkwing Duck—because he's got the right ego-attitude for a super-hero and his villains are really cool parodies of the Batman ones.

8) Batman—B.A. (before angst) need I say more?

7) Green Arrow—B.G.S.V.& A. (before gratuitous sex, violence, *and* angst—excuse me, before it was "For *Mature* Readers").

6) Screwball—(see #5) "The Happy Hero".

5) Flaming Carrot—because of his weird adventures, especially those with the Mystery men in general and Screwball in particular, and because, strangely enough, it was one of the things that helped to get me through my Dad's (eventually) fatal illness in 1988.

4) Pfirsich Rommel (The Desert Peach)—well, *I* think he's *super*.

3) Cutey Bunny—Gosharooty, why-ever not? (Also because innuendo is MUCH funnier than out in plain sight).

2) A tie between:

a. Fission Chicken—because he doesn't put up with *anything*, by God, and because he trashed "Care Bears" in an early adventure.

b. The Tick—because he's nigh-invulnerable.

And the #1 greatest superhero of all time is:

1) Mr. Spook (of the Beanworld)—because he's got *all* the qualities of a true superhero—a secret origin that he doesn't remember because of amnesia, a really cool mentor in Mr. Teach'em, the keen insight and self-less determination to single-handedly protect the Beanworld, *and* because I like him.

As runners-up I'd like to mention Firestorm (before they screwed with him) Groo the Wanderer, and Asterix the Gaul.

I can't *wait* to see issue #200!!

● *The Peach a super-hero? Oh, Dear! —TH*

KEVIN T. BROWN
Norridge, IL

Top Ten

Boy, what a request. The ten best super-heroes of all time? Don't know how many of *my* ten best will be on any other list, especially for the reasons I give, but here it goes:

1) Superman—Without him there probably would be no other costumed heroes. Period.

2) Spider-Man—Marvel Comics' main man. All others are compared to him at some point in time.

3) Batman—The first non-powered super-hero—and still the best.

4) Captain America—The super patriot. The best of America personified.

5) Wonder Woman—The first super-heroine. Others try to copy her, but fall woefully short.

6) Captain Marvel—The Big Red Cheese. Not too many heroes have sold a million copies of their book—*without* the benefit of trading cards, multiple covers, etc...

7) The Spirit—By Will Eisner. Nothing else needs to be said.

8) Flash—The Silver-Age version. He ushered in an entire new generation of super-heroes for people to enjoy.

9) Robin—The first kid side-kick.

10) Green Lantern—Silver-Age version. *My* all time favorite super-hero.

As you can see I've eliminated hero groups (i.e. X-Men, Fantastic Four) simply because you didn't ask for groups. However, the FF would definitely make the above list, as would the Justice Society of America, as an important part of comics' history.

P.S. If you happen to choose my letter as the winner, please feel free to donate the prize to whatever appropriate charity you want. It's not that I don't want them, but I'm sure somebody out there needs them more that I do and will put them to good use. Thank You.

● *I'll try to honor you're wishes if you win, Kevin, but I honestly have no idea what charity could "need" the paltry gift of $20 in Fantagraphics books. "Hey, there's no more earthquake relief, but somebody sent us ten copies of* Holo Brothers *#4!" —TH*

WARREN PURKEL
Mishawaka, IN

Bigger is Better

I continue to enjoy each issue, and *Amazing Heroes* #199 was no exception—but 90 pages is hardly enough. Make 'em thicker—*More, More!*

Looking forward to #200; since it'll be all comics, it *will* be Manga-size, right?

OK, as for this Shadowman guy on the cover: how many other heroes have an illustration on their chest, rather than a letter or symbol? I can see how useful this would be: bad guy stops, stares, says "Hey—what's that? Oh, hmmm, maybe a man framed in a doorway, with light spilling past him into the darkness?" And by that time, Shadowman could have clobbered him, de-pants'ed him, or whatever.

Nice to see the article on Sandman, in all his varied forms. I like the illustrations (hey! Sandman is right up there with Hawkeye/Giant Man/Ant Man/Dr. Pym, except he should've tossed in some name changes: the Man of Sand, The Incredible Sandy, The Sandy Knight...). Besides, younger fans gotta memorize all this history, or where will they be? (I know—looking at !mpact Comics and saying, "Wow—totally fresh and mind blowing!").

By the way, I heartily agree with Steven Robinson (in #199's lettercol) it was a truly terrible idea to reveal Hawk as the big-but-never-really-impressive Monarch in the *Armageddon* series. I've always enjoyed Hawk & Dove (even before Dove changed sexes), and even if their recent series wasn't perhaps all it could've been, I don't think that the characters should've been trashed this way.

Regarding your regular features, this enquiring mind continues to want to know all the stuff in Andy Mangels' "Backstage." And I love Don Rosa's "Cover Gallery"—maybe once a year, give him 3 or 4 pages, eh? I just know he could rise to the occasion. And, sorry Teri, but I rarely laugh at "The Cartoonist" the way I do at "Strom's Index." Hey, I'd even like to see a Best of "Strom's Index" Trade Paperback (if the price was right).

You asked for a Top 10 super-heores of all time list, so I'm coming up with one, but I'll add a second list which I consider even more important, OK?

Top 10 Best Super-Heroes of All Time

Very honorable Mention to Jack Kirby's New Gods: if those books were coming out today, they'd be a whole line, like !mpact, only 1000 times better.

10) Daredevil (as shaped by Lee, Colan, Miller, *and* Nocenti)

9) Thor (Kirby's & Simonson's versions, not the current #*☆!)

8) The Hulk (including the fine new "merged" one)

7) The Flash (speed: now that's high-concept)

6) Green Lantern (science fiction,

special FX, & willpower)

5) Captain Marvel/Miracleman (two great versions of one hero: Golden Age simplicity vs. Modern complexity)

4) Plastic Man (thank you, Mr. Cole)

3) Superman (before Byrne fiddled with him)

2) Batman (so good, that it's hard for anyone to make him totally boring)

1) Swamp Thing (Moore's version was brilliant—period)

Top 5 DC Heroes or Groups *Crying Out* to be Used to Their Full Potential

5) The Kid [Chris] in *Dial "H" for Hero* (he'd make a great sidekick for Flaming Carrot)

4) Metamorpho (sure, he's been in the Justice League, but they never used him for squat)

3) Metal Men (part X-Men, part Terminator, and part Plastic Man—Simonson did 'em right)

2) The Spectre (an awesome character who could be treated a la Sandman)

1) Justice Society of America (a run of issues written by Moore, Gaiman, or Morrison, and illustrated by Ordway, might just change the world)

STEVEN PHILLIP JONES
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Thank You for Mentioning My Malibu Comic in *AH* #198: Part One

I just wanted to drop a line to let you know I enjoyed your latest issue, and for more than one reason.

Thanks, first, for the essay by Peter David about *Hulk*. As is the case with Mr. David's "But I Digress. . ." column for *Comic Buyer's Guide*, David's article was informative, funny, and revealing. He is, simply stated, one of the best creators working in the industry right now, and I wish there were more talents of his caliber writing in comics today. Good luck to you in the future, Mr. David.

Thanks, thanks, for the Dale Keown interview. The public relations folks at Marvel certainly have been remiss in not hyping this guy's art before now. I've been following Keown's career since his days on *Dragonring*, and have enjoyed watching his style develop over the past six years. It was nice to learn a little bit about the gentlemen behind the art, and a pleasure to discover he is a delightful, enthusiastic, and intelligent person who cares about the craft of creating comics. Good luck to you as well, Mr. Keown.

And, finally, thanks, thanks, thanks, to who ever decided to run Keown's cover for Eternity's *Dracula*. This thanks is a personal appreciation, since I was the writer on Eternity's adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel. I was overjoyed when Tom Mason, the creative director at Malibu Graphics, Eternity's parent company, told me Keown was going to be drawing one of *Dracula*'s covers. Adapting the novel was a dream project of mine since childhood, and having Keown contribute a cover was a bonus.

(For you collectors out there, that cover appears on *Dracula* #3, and was reprinted on the back cover for Eternity's *Street Heroes 2005* #2, and *Planet of the Apes* #1. They are great! And I might recommend Keown fans check out the cover on *Dracula* #1 by S. Clarke Hawbaker, the new artist on Marvel's *Nomad* series. You'll understand when you see it.)

Keep up the good work at *Amazing Heroes*, and again, thanks for a terrific issue.

● *It was Dale who sent in the cover, and Mark Thompson was the one who decided to run it. Mark says, "You're welcome." —TH*

RICK FORGUS
Scottsdale, AZ

Thank You For Mentioning my Malibu Comic in *AH* #198: Part Two

[*To TM Maple*] Thanks for taking the time to review my first issue of *Johnny Atomic*. As my first venture into the comics field, I'm happy to get any sort of feedback on its strengths and short comings in hopes of making any future projects stronger.

I agree that the art on the first book was stiff and my nervousness showed through in the inking, but I hope you will read the remaining two issues as I believe more confidence is evident. If the characters seemed too "sweet," it was intentional on my part as I wanted to contrast the naivete of what I deemed the '50s to be against a harsh subculture of governmental control. If the writing seemed heavy-handed I can only attribute that to the fact that it was my first attempt at storytelling.

Dave Olbrich and Tom Mason of Malibu were constantly supportive of my fledgling efforts and very encouraging. I owe them a debt of thanks and gratitude for giving me the rare opportunity of producing my own character.

KEITH R.A. DeCANDIDO
New York, NY

Word Balloons

Well, I knew the risks going in when I sent the review copies of *Word Balloons: Interviews with Comics Folk* out (*AH* #199, p. 74). I'm sorry Wong didn't like it, but I can't argue with his criticisms—they are valid opinions, though I didn't think it came across as an infomercial. Ah well.

It's difficult when you're interviewing someone to tread the line between vapid and polite (I thought I stayed polite, Wong thought me vapid.) On the one hand you don't want to alienate these nice people (and they all were—even Gary), and on the other hand you don't want to come across as a mindless dweeb.

The only point of Wong's I'd like to take issue with is his suggestions for "jazz(ing) things up." Yes indeed, I had a limited budget. Taping at a convention or a comic store means location shooting which is *much* more expensive than shooting in the studio I used and not as easy to arrange and not as controlled an environment. Wong also suggests I "do some cheesy special effects via the video equipment," which I didn't do because I *hate* "cheesy special effects via the video equipment." I wanted the content to stand on its own without smoke and mirrors—all that does is distract from what the people are talking about. (This was one of the flaws of Ron Mann's *Comic Book Confidential*.)

Wong also recommends decorating the set with comics posters and things which I should have done, and will do for *Word Balloons '92*—a series of (at least) five half-hour interview shows coming to NYC cable and videocassette in late summer 1992.

(Out of curiosity, what did Wong think of Ken Viola's *Masters of Comic Books Art*, which had a more famous lineup of guests and had Harlan Ellison introducing the interviews instead of some comics critic from New York?)

By the way, you never indicated in the review how to order *WB:IWCF*. Make check or money order for $15 per tape out to Keith R.A. DeCandido and send to *Word Balloons* c/o *The Chronic Rift*, P.O. Box 2224, New York, NY 10185-0023.

● *Well, Keith, you can at least compare his review of your video to his review of the* Comic Book Greats *video. —TH*

KEVIN MATHEWS
Singapore

Violence is Blue

Super-heroes are fantasy? Does that mean that they are a "product of the imagination?" or in other words, super-heroes are the "consequence of *creative ability*?" (All quotes from my *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Well, maybe 1% of super-heroic fiction so qualifies. The rest . . . is just plain product. Sorry, Tom, I call 'em as I see 'em.

The "outing" of Northstar has generated lots of attention hasn't it? CNN, Newsweek & Entertainment have run the story. Naturally, this warrants that collectors who have hitherto never touched an *Alpha Flight* comic will now come like crazed lemmings.

Could this be a cheap publicity stunt by Marvel (not usually known for such things) under the guise of AIDS awareness? What do you think?

Speaking of cheap publicity stunts, the *Marvel 1992 Preview*—I HOPE IT CHOKES ON ITS OWN VOMIT. 'NUFF SAID!

I hear that Matt Wagner has quite a few new projects lined up this year—*Demon*, *Legends of the Dark Knight*, *Dr. Fate*, *Aerialist*, and *Grendel*. Can an interview be far off?
HINT! HINT!

Hulk-a-mania. Peter David's essay was insightful. It's great to see how David transformed *Hulk* into the *best* Marvel book on the racks. Dale Keown's art is okay but his crack about Eros Comix was ironic. Isn't Keown a purveyor of adolescent power fantasies—virtually "violence porn?!" What do you think? Get a life, indeed. Remember, Dale, when you point your finger at anyone, there's always three more pointing back at you.

"Elvis Screams"?! Gimmie a break!

Most vapid Super-hero. Obviously, Superman:
1) Wears underwear *over* his pants.
2) "Disguises" himself with spectacles & slight change of hairstyle.
3) What the heck is Super-breath. What do you think?

P.S. Have you heard Lou Reed's *Magic & Loss*? Please do.

● *It still takes an imagination to come up with a super-hero, no matter how poor the imagination or how derivative the super-hero. I stand by my definition. —TH*

BOB HUGHES
Merrimack, NH

Caught You Napping

In *AH* #199 Steven Miller claimed that Jack Kirby and Joe Simon created Sandy the Golden Boy and the yellow and purple version of the Sandman in *Adventure* # 69. Chad Grothkopf drew that issue. Paul Norris did the two issues after that. Simon and Kirby didn't start on the feature until *Adventure* #72.

He then goes on to say that Sandman was replaced by Dr. Mid-Nite in *Adventure* #103. Dr. Mid-Nite never appeared in *Adventure*. Sandman was replaced by Superboy, Aquaman, Green Arrow or Johnny Quick. (Take your pick; they all started in the same issue.) Of course it could be worse; *Overstreet* has *Adventure* #69 drawn by Bob Kane!

JEFF MYERS
Fresno, CA

Weight's the Matter?

I really enjoyed Gary Robinson's article on "Heavy Heroes." I hope it served to remind people that being fat does not prevent a person from being heroic. Why are there so few fat heroic characters, especially fat female characters, in comic books? Well, you can't really blame the comic book industry; it is merely a symptom of a much larger problem, which is the stigmatization of weight. Extremely fat or thin characters serve as some of the basic visual archetypes in comic books, a predominantly visual medium. There is the tall, gaunt evil scientist, the fat and stupid thug, the weak thin girl, or the obsessive fat woman. Comic books didn't create these stereotypes, but they use them very effectively. Perhaps, if there were more realistic heavy heroes in comics, like Maggie in *Love & Rockets* or Zephyr in Valiant's *Harbinger*, then comics could help out a bit in reducing this "weighty" stigma.

LETTERS PAGE CONTEST WINNER

Kevin Mathews, Adam-Troy Castro's arch foe, wins for his unflattering description of Superman in this issue. Perhaps Clark can fly Adam to Singapore so they can both beat him up?

the Chronicles of TS. Wood
AAAGH!
HORRIBLE! It's just TOO HORRIBLE!
WOOD?
THE ROCKS
YOU OKAY, WOOD?
No... I'm not. I... I WANTED TO DO A MARVEL JOKE. AND, WELL, I USED TO BE A BIG X-MEN FAN IN THE EIGHTIES. SO, I THOUGHT I'D PICK UP A FEW ISSUES AND JUST SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW, YA KNOW?
WELL, THE OLD X-MEN SPLIT UP, FORMED NEW MUTANT BADDIES, AND FORMED NEW X-GROUPS. THEN THESE NEW GROUPS FOUND LOTS OF NEW EVIL MUTANTS. WE'RE TALKING LIKE HUNDREDS OF MUTANTS HERE! I MEAN EVERYBODY'S A GENE MUTANT NOW-A-DAYS! I TELL YA, MARKEL'S OUTA CONTROL! IT CAN'T STOP ITSELF! IT'S STAFF JUST KEEPS CRANKING OUT MORE AND MORE MUTANTS!
IT'S GOTTA STOP! WE MUST STOP THEM!
WE NEED TO GO DOWN TO THE MARVEL OFFICES AND... AND KILL THEM!! KILL THEM BEFORE THEY CAN CREATE ANY MORE MUTANT BOOKS!
NO MORE!! NO MORE MUTANTS!
HOW... WAIT A MINUTE. MAYBE I SHOULD TRY TO SELL THEM MY TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA SILVER COMIC BOOK IDEA! YEAH!
DEEP SIGH.

STROM'S INDEX

by Dave Strom

Number of times per decade the New Titans are "changed forever:" 3

Number of really weird people who show up in comic book shops per month: 2

Example: Someone who brags (loudly) about buying a club just down the street (he didn't) and invites the shop's manager to come in soon, cause soon, "It's gonna be (claps hand together) members only." and then flashes his cellular phone (the manager dialed it—he got an answering machine).

Number of minutes between my brother starting to read *Sandman*'s "Preludes and Nocturnes" and his saying how disgusting it was: 15

[I still like your work, Neil.]

The name someone called *Detective Comics* on the InterNet computer network: *Defective Comics*

Chances of a Canadian cop arresting the owner of a comic book shop for carrying sex comics if said comics are written in English: 9 in 10

If they are written in French: 9 in 1000

Ratio of the noise made by a super-villain group announcing that it is **here, and** [insert name of super-hero group here] **is now doomed**, and the noise made by a Harley Davidson being revved up: 1:1

Number of these groups who have the faintest scintilla of an idea just what the element of surprise is: 0

Number of Marvel comics that were "shocking," according to their covers, on January 3, 1991: 2

Messages that the Wolverine toy action figure can say (to that rad metallic beat):

"I got claws, I can use 'em!"

"Take your best shot!"

"SKNIT!"

Number of fat, smashed silverfish I found on the inside front cover of a discounted graphic novel in a box of discounted comics: 1

[ICK.]

Location of the Pied Piper announcing that he is gay: Near the front of the comic book

Location of Northstar doing so: Near the back of the comic book

Number of T&A pictures in *Justice League Quarterly* #6: 12

Chances of the Punisher opening his mouth wide when firing a semi-automatic: 1 in 3

[He must aim better when he screams.]

If Saddam Hussein dies, chances of the Punisher being written to have done it: 5 in 6

Number of readers who thought Flipper never looked so happy as when he was on the cover of Fathom's (of the Elementals) *Sizzling Sex Special* #1: 1

[Anyone else think of that?]

Name of the Nation of Islam's security force for hire: X Men (apologies if this is misspelled)

Chances of Marvel Comics suing over this: 1 in 1,000,000,000,000,000

[More zeroes? Nah.]

Amount of visible exhaust from the GI Joe vehicles in the cartoons where the Joes fight Cobra pollution: 0

Chances of the above statistics being accurate, since I made them all up: 1 in 1000 ●

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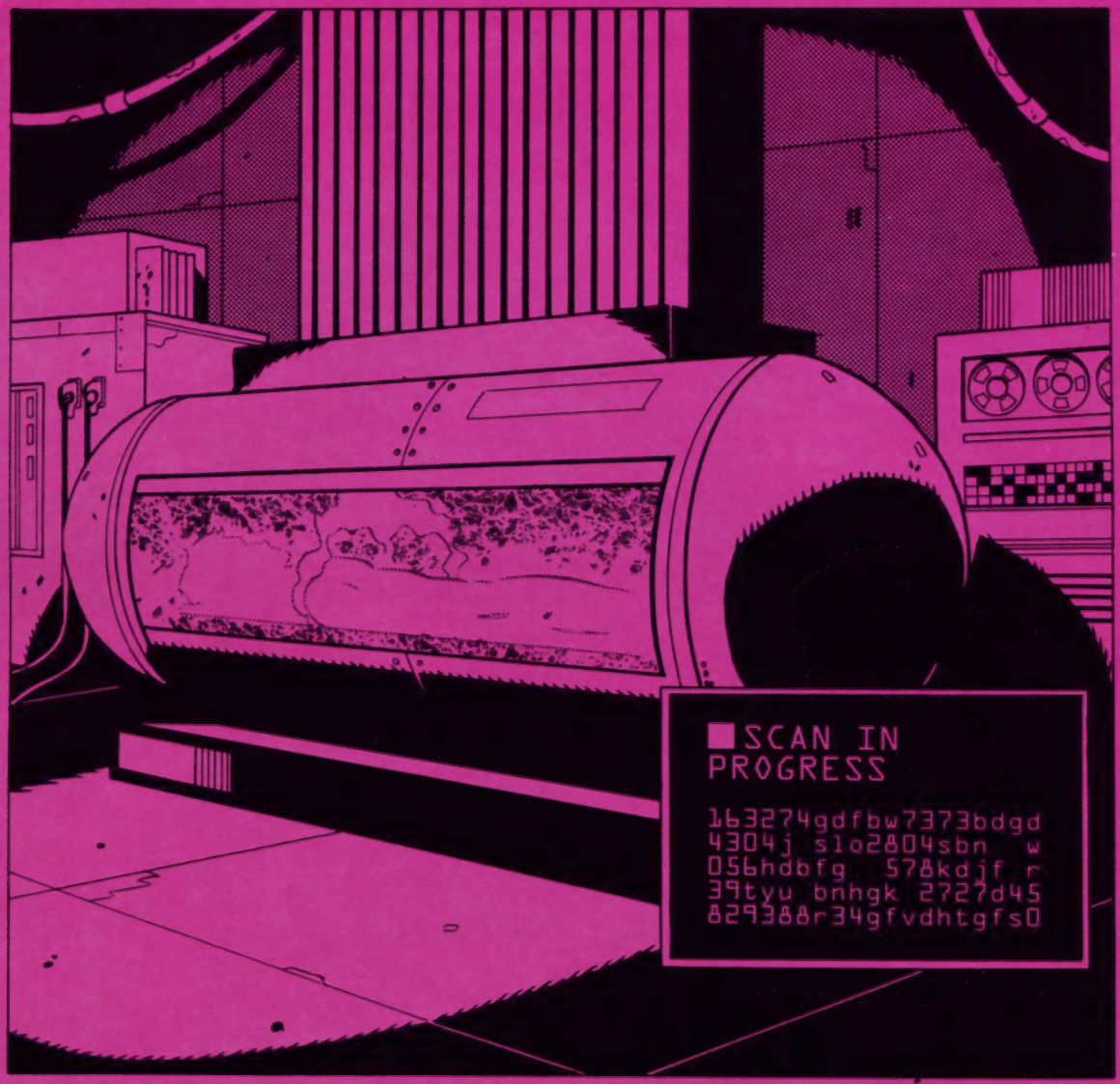

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